Redefining

Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry

Conversations along the way

Don Priest

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Contents

Introduction

Redefining is a response to a range of concerns I identified while collating, editing and publishing many of my more than seven hundred lay ministry and one of my academic study resources. They cover about four decades of fifty years of my involvement in Christian churches and other groups. I believe that communities which are committed to growing together and to understanding themselves and their social and physical environments can emerge even in predominantly power-dominated cultures.

Redefining outlines some of the ways I have sought to be more alert and better able to reject discrimination, denigration and disadvantage when involved in church and related Christian communities.

My reflections on *Meaning and Scripture*, *Inclusion and Hierarchies* and *Community and Ministry* form an autoethnographic ethno-theological triptych – a self-written portrayal of inter-related personal explorations originating in a range of lay ministry, work and family experiences. This framework determines its limitations and delimitations and helps identify its strengths and inadequacies. The various styles used in these entries may add value as well as involving a level of repetition and redundancy.

Redefining, like my other books, is a lay-person's working journal, written and shared in the hope that it will encourage growth in love and understanding as we care for one another in this beautiful but troubled world. I hope that, as this book is read, worship is deepened, relationships are encouraged and application to everyday life is enriched.

Don Priest
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Meaning and Scripture

Reflections on a personal journey

Searching for meaning and exploring Scripture

I have a long history of avoiding and opposing literalistic interpretations, and of encouraging and seeking to practice a theological Bible reading that explores narratives, thematic trajectories and the diverse range of literary forms evident in the Scriptures. I believe that those who labelled me towards the extremes of biblical interpretation have usually aligned me with leaders whose approaches to Scripture and theology are significantly different to my own.[1]

My parents encouraged daily Bible reading using Scripture Union resources from when I first learned to read. My quality Scofield KJV Bible with Ussher's dating system along with our weekly Sunday lunch Scripture readings and prayers reinforced their commitment to the spirit and substance of passages such as 2 Timothy 3:14–17.

My parents' Sunday School and Christian Endeavour leadership reinforced their devotional commitment to reading Scripture prayerfully but left me with many unanswered questions. My developing fascination with numbers, patterns, systems and processes intersected with a curiosity that led me to read Old Testament passages well beyond daily reading cycles. Ussher's dates may have been accurately calculated from a literal reading of biblical numbers, but why wouldn't symbolism apply to numbers as well as words – especially in the poetic, hyperbolic, parabolic and apocalyptical language evident in much of Genesis, Exodus, Revelation and other biblical writings? My questioning was reinforced by my maternal grandfather's fascination with an unsuccessful time-scaled historicist view of Jesus' second coming.[2]

A second critical factor was the rapid decline of Norwood Baptist Church, the local church our family attended. Social and cultural changes led to a virtually complete dislocation between an increasingly aging congregation and the local younger community. I wondered and explored what insights biblical stories might provide concerning the disconnections that were evident between that church and its immediate neighbourhood.

Leadership involvement in the Adelaide University Evangelical Union led to informative dialogue with Student Christian Movement and Lutheran Student Fellowship leaders, as well as by participating in Clubs and Societies Council activities. I appreciated learning of the perspectives adopted in debates between students in the charismatic and evangelical Jesus movements as well as across other

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[1] Aspects of my approach to Scripture are outlined in Don Priest, *Learning to Love Wisdom* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2019).

[2] Cecil Howard intentionally gave me his copy of H. Grattan Guinness, *Approaching End of the Age, The* (Paternoster Row, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880).

theological and denominational contexts. These viewpoints were significantly enriched by my Diploma of Education studies in educational sociology, philosophy and history following four years of study that culminated in a pure mathematics honours research project.[3]

I gained early insights from understanding a little of Solzhenitsyn's *suffering*-God,[4] Jacques Ellul's *people's*-God,[5] C. S. Lewis' *here*-God[6] and Francis Schaeffer's *there*-God.[7] Other perspectives came from reading Colin Brown and Viktor Frankl,[8] while Leon Morris, [9] J. I. Packer,[10] John Stott, [11] Martin Lloyd Jones[12] and F. F. Bruce[13] also helped my theological thinking.[14]

Reading James Denney, James Orr and P. T. Forsyth several years later further enriched my understanding of ways of reading and interpreting Scripture.[15]

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[3] Don Priest, *Integer Solutions of Mordell's Diophantine Equation* (Private collection, 1972).

[4] Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *From under the Rubble* (Great Britian: Fontana Paperbacks, 1976).

[5] Jaques Ellul, *Politics of God and the Politics of Man, The* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972); *Meaning of the City, The* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997); *Judgment of Jonah, The* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, c1971).

[6] C. S. Lewis, *Narnia Chronicles, The* (Great Britian: Puffin Books, 1974). Cf. *Mere Christianity* (London and Glasgow, UK: Fontana Books, 1971); *Fern-Seed and Elephants* (Glasgow, UK: Fount Paperbacks, 1981); *Great Divorce, The* (Glasgow, UK: Fount Paperbacks, 1983).

[7] Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970); *God Who Is There, The* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973).

[8] Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969), Victor E. Frankl, *Will to Meaning, The* (New York, USA: Penguin Books, 1988).

[9] Leon Morris, *Spirit of the Living God* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1960); *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, The* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 1965); *Lord from Heaven, The* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974). Also, *Atonement, The: Its Meaning and Significance* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983); *Cross in the New Testament, The* (Exeter, Devon, UK: Paternoster Press, 1979).

[10] J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973); *Knowing God* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973).

[11] John R. W. Stott, *Men Made New (Romans 5-8)* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969); *Basic Christianity* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971). Also, *Cross of Christ, The* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989).

[12] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970); *From Fear to Faith (Habakkuk)* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970).

[13] F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Documents, The* (London, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1960); *Spreading Flame, The* (Exeter, Devon, UK: Paternoster Press, 1976); *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter, Devon, UK: Paternoster Press, 1980).

[14] From Don Priest, *Living Love* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022), 160.

[15] James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895); *Death of Christ, The* (New Canaan, Connecticut, USA: Keats Publishing, 1981); P. T. Forsyth, *Work of Christ, The* (London, UK: Independent Press, 1938); *Cruciality of the Cross, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation

Pure and applied mathematics and mathematical physics provided many examples of the development and redefinition of paradigms and frames of reference which helped inform my understanding of differences evident in the theological resources and biblical commentaries that I was reading. I found these variations to be enriching rather than problematic and that they helped shape my thinking about trinitarian, incarnational and atonement theologies.

The interconnections I saw between mathematical, theological, educational, sociological and philosophical paradigms were enhanced by learning opportunities in my educational leadership in school mathematics curriculum and teaching. Attending the International Congress on Mathematical Education in Adelaide provided a context for exploring curriculum opportunities for students with a range of aspirations and abilities relating to learning mathematics. Increasing awareness of different mathematical pedagogies to the absolutist, object-oriented Platonist understandings of traditional mathematics teaching led to a more constructivist approach that encouraged creative thinking rather than mere rote learning.[16]

My growing understanding of various trinitarian, incarnational and atonement theologies was fostered by reading about missions in different cultures, by reflecting on the formulations used in denominational settings and by reading pastoral and theological resources.[17] This literature included my immediate access to Geoffrey Bingham's publications and other authors in addition to those already mentioned, including Samuel Chadwick and Thomas Smail.[18]

Later reading prior to my Master of Theological Studies course through Flinders University included James and Thomas Torrance and Colin Gunton.[19] An earlier

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Publications Inc., 1984); James Orr, *Christian View of the World* (New York, USA: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/orr/view.html, 1908).

[16] Cf. Ubiratan D'Ambrosio, 'Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress on Mathematical Education' (paper presented at the *Fifth International Congress on Mathematical Education*, Adelaide, Australia, 1984, 1986).

[17] Deno John Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West* (New York, NY, USA: Harper and Row, 1966). Philip Jenkins, *Lost History of Christianity, The* (New York, New York, USA: Harper Collins, 2008).

[18] 'New Creation Teaching Ministry Resource Library,' New Creation Publications Inc., https://www.newcreationlibrary.org.au;
Thomas A. Smail, *Reflected Glory* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), *Forgotten Father, The* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), cf. Tom Smail, Andrew Walker, and Nigel Wright, *Love of Power or Power of Love, The* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: Bethany House, 1994); Thomas A. Smail, *Giving Gift, The* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994). Samuel Chadwick, *Gospel of the Cross, The* (Torquay, UK: Epworth Press, 1935); *Way to Pentecost, The* (Bungay, Suffolk, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935).

[19] Colin E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation* (Carlise, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1992); *Promise of Trintarian Theology, The* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1993); *Actuality of Atonement, The* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1994); *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London, UK:

Pentateuch topic completed through the Highland Theological College of the University of the Highlands and Islands provided valuable insights about the prevailing evangelical culture from the conquest-covenant practices of ancient near-eastern societies.[20]

The changes in the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES) and New Creation Publications Inc. (NCPI) under new generational leadership agendas created time and space to revisit what I had begun to understand about these learning areas. My disconnect with these evangelical environments reflected concerns I had when I was first involved in these groups.

My work towards a Master of Theological Studies degree included reading a range of scholars from Roman Catholic and other settings – readings that I found enriching and encouraging.[21] My Theological Studies dissertation and my major project for Educational Leadership and Management both generated further insights to biblical narratives about meaning, culture and power.[22]

I frequently encountered evangelical presumptions that seemed to assume the universal validity of their hermeneutical lenses by default – lenses which all too often appeared to be hierarchically and ecclesiastically privileged while actively excluding and subordinating women and those from different social, cultural and ethnic communities to their own.

Hans Bürki's essay on *The symphony of being or the meaning of fellowship* is a welcome reminder to me of the all too brief contact we had with him and the contrast he provided to the predominantly Sydney-centric Australian evangelicalism.

I found that local evangelical preferencing and prioritising often included limited interest and research into first century and ancient near eastern settings and that

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T&T Clark, 2003); Christoph Schwöbel and Gunton Colin E., eds., *Persons, Divine and Human* (Edinburgh,: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1991). James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1996); James B. Torrance and Roland C. Walls, *John Duns Scotus in a Nutshell* (Edinburgh, UK: Handsel Press, 1992); Thomas F. Torrance, *Mediation of Christ, The* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1992); *Trinitarian Faith, The* (Edinburgh, UK: T&T Clark, 1993).

[20] Cf. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promise Land* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1995).

[21] Including D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1968); Robert Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey, USA: P&R Publishing, 2004); Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004); Gilles Emery, *Trinity, The: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011); Anne Hunt, *Trinity, The: Insights from the Mystics* (Collegeville, Minnesota, USA: ATF Press, 2010); George G. Hunter III, *Celtic Way of Evangelism, The: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 2010); Gerald O'Collins, *Tripersonal God, The* (Mahwah, New Jersey, USA: Paulist Press, 1999).

[22] Don Priest, *Effective and Innovative Educational Leadership Relating to Implementing Digital Technologies in Schools* (2013); *Educational, Social and Theological Themes in Proverbs 1–9* (2014).

it had a predominantly antiquarian flavour when it occurred. As time progressed, I realised I had been too greatly impacted by these approaches. I have benefitted in more recent years from podcast series including those hosted by Peter Enns and Jared Byas, N.T. Wright, and Scot McKnight.[23]

The *Bible in Australia* provides many informative insights into Australia's interactions with Christianity's sacred book. Lake's thesis develops insights into 'the Bible's changing place in Australian culture'. She profiles the Bible as 'a fluid thing, ever changing' depending on the 'languages, contexts and communities in which it appears'. Lake reasons that the Bible has 'mattered to Australia in three main guises – the globalising Bible, the cultural Bible and the theological Bible'.[24] Priorities about power, people and perception provide a ready reckoning basis for making sense of my experiences of Christian leaders in a range of Christian settings. These concerns help explain the growth and decay of different church and related communities and the fruitfulness and fruitlessness of the ministries of those who founded or later led them.

Christopher Frechette and Elizabeth Boase's introduction to the essays in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* nominates the usefulness of ways interpreters study trauma, relationships between personal and group traumatic experiences, and ways trauma hermeneutics might benefit other areas of theological research.[25] Their insights are invaluable both for understanding hermeneutics and for exploring approaches to the Bible that help improve awareness of trauma and its impact on communities and individuals.

Some of my own journey is outlined elsewhere in this and my other books, especially *Learning to Love Wisdom* and *Living in Love and Freedom*, which contain relevant bibliographies.[26]

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[23] Pete Enns and Jared Byas, *The Bible for Normal People*, podcast audio, https://peteenns.com/podcast/; Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Roots*, podcast audio, https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/kingdom-roots-with-scot-mcknight/id1078739516; N.T. Wright, *Ask Nt Wright Anything* (https://askntwrightanything.podbean.com).

[24] Meredith Lake, *Bible in Australia, The* (Sydney, NSW: NewSouth Publishing, 2018), 2.

[25] Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds., *Bible through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta, USA: SBL Press, 2016).

[26] Don Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2017); *Learning to Love Wisdom*; Cf. *Living Love*. Frankl, *Will to Meaning, The*.

Snapshots of some significant themes

Hans Bürki: *The symphony of being or the meaning of fellowship*[27]

Everything in the universe, according to Bürki, has some level of 'affinity' which enables it to be 'in communion one with another'. He describes this 'coherence' as the 'primordial miracle of being' where all things are created interdependent and inter-related.

While our rationalised explanations 'tend to stifle our awareness of the ineffable composition and the underlying mystery of our universe', our thought processes are one way in which we engage in 'universal communing'. This participation is both biological and psychic and all of us 'have our heartstrings and life melodies playing in this gigantic symphony of being', aware in various ways that we are frail, dependent and limited:

> We are dust from dust; this in itself is a kind of fellowship which we ignore, and yet it is a basic and undeniable relationship of our existence.

Bürki rejects reasoning that his beliefs are pantheistic since 'spiritual fellowship' requires 'the biological and psychological foundation of our being'. Psalm 19 outlines 'this symphonic composition of the universe', with spiritual realities relating to all our socialising activities. Paul's quote of this psalm in 1 Corinthians 15:40–44 indicates that in

> *Jesus Christ* the Creator communed within the coherence of the whole creation. In becoming a creature, the Creator revealed, re-established and sealed forever the symphonic responsive Creator-creature relationship. His life and death, His words and deeds, His solitudes and communions, His temptations and sufferings, His manner of being resounded throughout the universe.

While Jesus' coherence was perfect and ours is dissonant, discordant and lacking full symphonic resonance, we still know something of authentic participation. Nonetheless, we may mainly prefer the expenses associated with remaining superficial and restricted. The 'fellowship of sufferings' which Paul mentioned links with 'the companionship of compassion' that is essential to true symphonic being. In fact, according to Bürki, we, as creatures are always sharing in this 'symphony of being … and we should not be afraid nor ashamed of our lot'.

Bürki indicated that as a person's 'sense of reality' increases and they 'become more real as persons', they better understand

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[27] Hans F. Bürki, 'Symphony of Being or The Meaning of Fellowship, The,' *IFES Journal* 20, no. 2 (1967): 1–5.

that we cannot have affection without affliction, nor compassion without passion. And passion embraces both the utter agony of helpless suffering, and the strongest kind of affection.

This passion is the 'Passion of the Crucified' which is

the Passion of the Creator for and with and by His creature. In the Passion the agony of the dissonant and discorded universe rent the heart of the Saviour. And it was this breaking of His heart which restored to the universe the affectionate resonance of the Voice of Love Divine. And through His Passion He draws us into the communion of His Passion,[28] to love and to suffer, to be resonant and to resound, to share the renewed symphony of being.

Our response to Jesus' Passion is to 'present our minds to the understanding of the written Word of God', to 'subdue our hearts to the Living Voice, the attuning Heart of the universe, the passionate Christ' and to 'yield our innermost being to the comforting and concording groanings of the Spirit. … And He does all this through the communion of the Holy Spirit, the communion of the saints, the communion of the created universe'.

Bürki concludes by emphasising that there is a place of solitude for each of us where the 'Divine Presence' intimates of coming eternal realities where each person

has a name written in his heart that is only known by God and by the one who has this name,[29] and yet all shall bear His Name on their foreheads and shall see Him face to face.[30]

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[28] Philippians 3:10.

[29] Revelation 2:17.

[30] 1 Corinthians 13:12.

Ubiratan D'Ambrosio: *Socio-cultural bases for mathematical education*[31]

D'Ambrosio believed that the invention of writing, Greek antiquity and the European adoption of the Hindu-Arabic number system were among 'the most critical periods in the history of mathematics education'. He also believed that the current rapid changes resulting from digital technologies and the world's 'social, political and economic texture' are at least as significant as these earlier contexts. Efforts to give everyone access to mathematics education

> makes it urgent to question, in a much deeper and broader way than ever before, its socio-cultural roots, and, indeed, the place of mathematics education in societies as a whole.

The status of mathematics education brings disruptions and imbalances as well as benefits to contemporary societies. D'Ambrosio emphasised that the impact of human exploitation in causing dystopian outcomes needs to be considered when examining mathematics education.

> When I say 'perception, abilities and uses', I am placing myself in the position of looking at 'reality' as it is perceived by individuals who use their abilities in the form of strategies, to perform actions which invariably have their uses in modifying reality. I am talking of human behaviour as a cyclic model connecting *reality - individual - action - reality* as characteristic of human beings.

He secondly referenced the hierarchical ways in which people's actions move from individuals to groups to cultures to transcultural activities. These transitions can be partially explained by examining the way language is used to communicate and inform children and adults, especially when families relocate from rural to urban environments.

His third factor relates to 'knowledge as action in the framework of the cyclic model'. Knowledge, he claimed, permits thoughts as well as actions to be considered a form of behaviour which impacts on and modifies reality. He insisted that there are

> no still or inactive moments, if we understand action in its most general sense, be it a material action or a purely reflective, intellectual, cognitive action. As far as there is life, there is action.

Reality, with its physical and 'intellectual, psychic and emotional' dimensions, is particularly significant when considering children's educational experiences. Knowing in this context is best understood as two dimensional: by using science to clarify the 'cosmic and psychic order' and by using art to do something creative:

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[31] D'Ambrosio, 'Proceedings of the Fifth International Congress on Mathematical Education.'

> This duality is well illustrated in the first four chapters of the Book of Genesis, which is an important tool in understanding the evolution of Western thought to what may be its most strikingly characteristic endeavour, western science and western art or technic, and its brainchild which is technology.

D'Ambrosio saw a complementarity rather than a dichotomy between science and art and their impacts via technology – a complementarity that spirals from knowing to doing to knowing etc., so enabling higher levels of personal consciousness. This interactive complementarity, according to D'Ambrosio, is too often ignored in educational settings. The interplay of abstract and social realities is therefore central to a proper appreciation of mathematics education and to humanity's future:

> Environmental equilibrium deserves the special concern of mathematics educators, and fits perfectly into the cycle, 'reality - individual - action - reality'.

When 'strategies and models' inform perceptions of reality through sensory emotions as well as by intellectual cognitions and lead to educationally rich actions then reality is altered by what civilisation recognises as art, technology and science. This strategic modelling is a core part of educational learning and involves the convergence of information and codification.

Learning, informing and codifying are therefore relevant to formal and informal educational activities, as can be seen by historical developments from oral to written to digital languages and illustrations. D'Ambrosio believed that the way media increasingly shapes informal learning needs urgent consideration by mathematics educators – and is probably the greatest challenge they face 'in both developed and developing countries'.

Flowing from this understanding of education was his belief that cultural diversity radically alters the way curricula should be designed and taught:

> Cultural diversity is so complex, it is a mesh of attitudes and behaviours which have not been sufficiently understood in education, and especially in mathematics education. I would dare to say they have practically never been recognised as important factors in mathematics education. Attitudes such as modes of thought, jargon, codes, interests, motivation, myths, build up to generate very definitive cultural roots, modes of production, modes of poverty, class conflicts, sense of social security, human rights and so on. These are the factors which comprise society, but are usually ignored in mathematics education.

Societal and educational conceptions are needed, according to D'Ambrosio, which understand the way people interact and develop practices, knowledge, jargon and

codes – and so learn mathematics, 'that is, the way they count, measure, relate and classify, and the way they infer'.

> Hence, we have the question, in dealing with the relationship of mathematics and society: which mathematics? Are we interested in the relationship between learned mathematics and society, or between ethno-mathematics and society, where 'ethnos' comes into the picture as the modern and very global concept of ethno both as race and/or culture, which implies language, codes, symbols, values, attitudes and so on, and which naturally implies science and mathematical practices.

> We have to look more carefully at this concept of ethno-mathematics in this context.

D'Ambrosio then discussed the way mathematical knowledge relating to different construction techniques was transmitted from one generation to the next in Amazon Indian communities 'totally without formal schooling'.

He saw cyclical innovation within learned mathematics as predominantly occurring inside a closed system that was unable to understand this ethno-mathematics while practically ignoring 'the results of the evaluation of mathematics practice vis-a-vis societal impact'. Any impact, according to D'Ambrosio, only comes after significant delays while, by contrast, ethno-mathematics 'is like a porous system with permanent interaction' and 'has an almost non-existent barrier with respect to society'.

> In other words, the relationship between ethno-mathematics and society is characterised by a fast reaction, through a self-regulating system. This self-regulating system manifests itself in the building-up of motivation, an essential component in education.

> Indeed, this self-regulating system activates the basic cycle, 'reality - individual - action - reality', upon which we have based our remarks on mathematics education, and its more dynamic relation with rapidly changing societies. It seems to me that to generate this dynamic is the key issue in mathematics education in the years to come.

Meredith Lake: *The Bible in Australia*[32]

The Bible, according to Lake, isn't a static or self-evident object but is a fluid, ever-changing entity appearing in a multitude of different forms depending on the contexts in which it exists. She asserts that there is now 'an ocean of competing answers' to questions about the Bible's 'sacredness, authority, interpretation and meaning'.[33] These questions about the Bible have been answered in three main ways – in terms of globalisation, culture and theology.

The globalising Bible

The Bible has a globalised flavour as it is a collection of composite texts written over many years by numerous authors in different languages and various locations. Its presence in Australia is

> a key element of the Australian experience of globalisation. It is part of what connects Australia to other places and peoples.[34]

These connections are marked by a range of factors. Lake firstly nominates European imperialism by British colonisers, emphasising that the Bible arrived in Australia wrapped in centuries of British and European thought and culture. The Bible had informed – and had been used to inform – the shape of modernity, its linear sense of time and destiny, its beliefs about government, culture, environment and humanity, and its language and literature.

Secondly, for Lake, the Bible was part of an imperialistic colonising project involving displacing convicts, usurping aboriginal lands and building new settlements. The Bible was used to develop narratives about these realities that were not always in agreement as it was accessed by the dispossessed as well as the powerful and privileged.

The Bible and culture

The cultural deposit of Christianity was deeply established from foci on the King James Bible – the so-called Authorised Version. Lake argues that this translation

> has been a reference point for generations of ordinary Australians, and a stimulating influence on creative imagination.

> The very idea of the Bible as a great text of our civilisation, a treasure trove of cultural riches … has a history of its own.[35]

The backdrop of the Enlightenment and its new criticisms based on historical and literary research – along with other humanist movements – was often framed in

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[32] Lake, *Bible in Australia, The*.

[33] Ibid., 3, 4.

[34] Ibid., 5.

[35] Ibid., 9.

the context of the Bible's cultural place in society. Attempts to focus on shared assumptions about culture rather than credal trust – on citizenship rather than religion were not disconnected from the Bible in a globalising context. This alignment of the Bible with western culture was itself part of a shift from its original social environment.

The theological Bible and the life of faith

Lake's heading implies an emphasis on both theology as an academic discipline and belief as a personal and community disposition. This faith was not always positive and includes derogatory *and* devotional language. Those emphasising a theologically derived sacredness to the Bible often saw this as essential to its relevance to Australian society. Lake points out that Shakespeare's 'influence in Australia is a distant second to the theological Bible's' as it was not seen as being worthy of religious devotion, as a guide for personal salvation or as a divinely inspired document.[36]

Conclusion

Lake argues that while the Bible's far-reaching influence on Australian life has been multi-faceted and variable, it 'is well and truly under Australian skin' as a transformative religious text, as an influence on culture and identity and as a source of rationalising and rejecting colonising globalism and the associated exploitations of both indigenous and other peoples and of Australia's unique resources and environment.[37]

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[36] Ibid., 13.

[37] Ibid., 15.

Christopher Frechette and Elizabeth Boase (Editors): *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*[38]

Frechette and Boase's introduction to this collection of papers is titled *Defining 'Trauma' as a useful lens for biblical interpretation.* They reference three critical areas, namely the usefulness of ways in which interpreters study trauma, relationships between personal and group traumatic experiences, and ways in which trauma hermeneutics might benefit other areas of theological research.

They outline ways that research in other fields of study impacts on the way biblical interpreters look at both the diversity of traumatic experiences and at the interpretative attempts made by people and communities who have experienced trauma and who survive, recover and become resilient.

Trauma is initially defined as being a 'distinct type of suffering that overwhelms a person's normal capacity to cope'.[39] Biblical trauma hermeneutics is seen as having dominant psychological, sociological and literary and cultural threads – threads that actively interact with each other.

Trauma studies as an interdisciplinary field

Trauma and recovery in individuals

Any person's perceptions about threats are culturally and situationally shaped, with their natural fight or flight responses rendered impossible, so leading to withdrawal and dissociation from both the traumatic event and their own intense responses.

Frechette and Boase state that

> Even as the mind creates psychic distance from the overwhelming feelings and thoughts, it attempts to make sense of the experience. It does so in ways that are largely unconscious but that may also enter consciousness.[40]

These unconscious ways include one's core beliefs, schemas and assumptions which emerge into consciousness and shape the way a person views themselves and their physical, community and spiritual environment. Traumatic experiences contradict, shatter and disrupt a person's sense of safety and well-being and replace it with a toxic narrative about themselves and their world. These changes may lead to a person feeling ashamed and blamed.[41] While this outcome might seem initially helpful, its longer-term consequences will almost certainly not assist anyone recover.

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[38] Boase and Frechette, *Bible through the Lens of Trauma.*

[39] Ibid., 3.

[40] Ibid., 5.

[41] Feelings of shame and blame can be increased by an abuser's actions.

Frechette and Boase outline recovery strategies by referencing Judith Herman. A person needs to locate a safe environment, to mourn traumatic experiences and to re-engage with a more normal life: 'All three tasks involve cultivating interpersonal solidarity'. Mourning, for example, 'involves remembering, interpreting and grieving the experience in an emotionally engaged manner'.[42]

There is an 'inherent paradox' in this process. Recovery partially depends on creating a 'coherent trauma narrative' in the context of being dissociated because of an experience that 'defies linguistic expression'.[43] Two aims associated with this trauma narrative both involve paradoxes. The need to recall what happened and what was experienced, and the need to interpret the trauma both involve gathering fragments from shattered experiences and then facing and replacing unhelpful ways in which these experiences may have been unwisely understood. The tensions inherent in these two paradoxes need to be preserved so that the trauma narrative can be of greatest assistance.

Frechette and Boase add that symbolic representations of the trauma event can also help in the process of finding meaning linked with traumatic events. Rebuilding trust can also be assisted by other people providing safe and supportive environments.

Collective trauma and recovery

Frechette and Boase describe two perspectives about collective trauma and recovery. Kia Erikson's perspective focuses on the destruction of community while Jeffrey Alexander highlights the social processes which communities use in adopting their selected trauma narrative. This narrative provides a group identity, identifies common suffering, nominates the source of the suffering and looks for other groups to connect with about their suffering.

The first approach primarily looks at processes that fragment while the second one seeks to address ways in which rebuilding might occur. The impact of both collective and individual trauma is linked with the awareness of the person or group involved. The narratives developed in both cases arise in the context of personal and group disruption and so can be expected to inform and shape the reforming that occurs following traumatic experiences.

Group narratives, like individual ones, may be symbolic rather than language based. Both narratives can help communities create safe environments where social reconnection and renewal can occur.

Reading literature through the lens of trauma

Frechette and Boase state that literary trauma theory

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[42] Boase and Frechette, *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*., 6.

[43] This recovery process is not helped when perpetrators generate and propagate false narratives.

is concerned with the ways that trauma may be encoded within texts, on the ways that texts may function in witnessing to trauma, and on the ways that texts may facilitate recovery and resilience.[44]

Some of the dilemmas and difficulties facing those who endeavour to document traumatic events and recovery from them have already been mentioned. Literature written from within traumatic experiences or about them during efforts to recover can be expected to highlight the paradox between trauma resisting expression and the requirement that it be represented to enable recovery and resilience.

Frechette and Boase indicate that 'literary trauma theory maintains as a cornerstone the unknowability of trauma'. This difficulty is identified as occurring belatedly and shapes the literary expression through 'gaps, repetitions and aporias'.[45] Trauma substantially disables language as a communication vehicle since statements specifically designed to describe traumatic experiences seem inadequate *and* unauthentic. These statements appear to those impacted by traumatic events as being ineffective in helping them explore ways in which they might be able to reinterpret what has happened to them *and* to reconnect with other people who have also been traumatised as well as with different contexts.

Frechette and Boase mention Ronald Granofsky's argument that this language derived reconstruction helps provide both safety and distancing from the traumatic events and so assists the person or group in confronting what has occurred to them. Granofsky identified fragmentation, regression and reunification as three aspects of any traumatic impact – aspects that can be expected to be noticed in literary or symbolic narratives.[46]

Trauma hermeneutics in biblical studies

This background provides a context for reflecting on trauma hermeneutics in biblical studies. Frechette and Boase quote Claus Westermann:

> The lament is the language of suffering; in it suffering is given the dignity of language: It will not stay silent![47]

Liberationist perspectives that arise from systemic oppression are one aspect of an array of approaches that seek to explore

> the fact that language can encode and respond to traumatic experience in ways that correspond to the effects of trauma as well as to mechanisms of survival, recovery, and resilience.[48]

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[44] Boase and Frechette, *Bible through the Lens of Trauma.*, 10.

[45] Ibid., 11.

[46] Ibid., 12.

[47] Ibid., 12.

[48] Ibid., 13.

Frechette and Boase mention two promising directions for a hermeneutics of trauma. It can reveal meaning not always evident from a straight-forward reading of the text and can provide theological and ethical insights into earlier as well as current contexts. Both directions attend to the collective and individual traumatic experiences linked with the historical events associated with these texts. These events may include devastation, exile, or oppression'.[49]

These directions can increase understandings of the 'gaps and disjunctions within texts, pointing to the impact of the often-violent disruptions that lie behind the textual world'.[50] Fresh insights may emerge by considering the ways in which rhetorical structure and thematic intention are used by the text's authors and subsequent editors independent of whether the text was written at a specific time of trauma.

Frechette and Boase state that

> Trauma studies affirm the importance of creating a trauma narrative, a coherent narrative capable not only of processing past trauma but also of fostering resilience against further traumatization. Such narratives serve to construct identity and solidarity in ways that can restore healthy assumptions about the self in relation to the world.[51]

Trauma hermeneutics considers ways that the text facilitates personal and community identity and well-being, and so becomes part of their collective narrative and traumatic events. Each person within these communities can be expected to want input from other people as they construct trauma narratives while simultaneously trying to address the deconstructing impact resulting from their traumatic experiences:

> To supplement Westermann's observation that lament gives suffering the dignity of language, grasping the effects of trauma helps to explain why many who suffer have such difficulty finding the necessary language to express their experience.[52]

Researchers who are alert to the impacts of trauma are more likely to discern what traumatised readers and listeners would have appreciated on reading and hearing these ancient texts. These insights may also help people who have faced or are encountering potential or actual traumatic experiences.

This blend of personal and collective considerations provides researchers with the potential to understand more about the disintegration and reintegration of the

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[49] Ibid., 13.

[50] Ibid., 14.

[51] Ibid., 15.

[52] Ibid., 15.

identities and attributes of the communities being represented. The way that meaning existed before and re-emerged during and after traumatic experiences may be seen in the 'ideological and symbolic frameworks that are intimately tied to the dynamics of power within the social group'.[53]

Biblical texts, according to Frechette and Boase, set this meaning formation process at least partially in activities that are 'set apart from ordinary activity', and may therefore 'be considered ritualized'.[54] They emphasise the significance of ritual spaces that are safe and shared for people in current situations who have experienced or are experiencing trauma *and* who seek to access biblical sources when developing their own narratives.

Frechette and Boase also reflect on the way that biblical texts which describe God acting in trauma-inducing ways might 'be understood as representations of trauma that serve as mechanisms of survival, recovery, or resilience'.[55]

[53] Ibid., 16.

[54] Ibid., 16.

[55] Ibid., 17.

Jared Byas: *What it means to take the Bible literally*[56]

Byas commences his exploration of claims made by those who take the Bible literally by suggesting that the phrase is used 'to articulate an entire set of beliefs while only using five little words'. His view is that those thinking and acting this way treat the Bible seriously and believe they 'must read it as historically and scientifically inerrant, as contemporaneously moral, as minimally metaphorical, as maximally supernatural and as obviously clear'.

Byas points out that words can be 'overworked' by having multiple meanings depending on the listeners and their situations and 'underpaid' by overinvesting meanings in them. Beliefs about the necessity of literal Bible readings include using them to identify with groups which assume the Bible is one book with a single view on every topic when it is better considered as an anthology which shares narratives from a range of traditions.

Reading the Bible as historically and scientifically inerrant fails for Byas because biblical accounts have a range of priorities and genres written in styles aligned with their original cultural settings.

He asserts that reading the Bible as contemporaneously moral assumes that it accurately reveals what God currently requires of us and provides for us. This emphasis, according to Byas, means people are likely to use it 'as a sort of incantation or magical spell' or as divinely mandated instructions.

Byas links minimising metaphorical and maximising supernatural interpretations. His view is that those who adopt these approaches prioritise selected traditions and react to the way discoveries have influenced biblical scholarship and secular culture. By contrast, literary readings read 'the Bible on its own terms'.

He thinks those who prefer a literal reading of the Bible consider that failing to believe that it is obviously clear as being defiant and dodging its message.

His final understanding is that those who read the Bible literally treat it as a serious and significant aspect of their faith. He regards this approach as foundational but does not consider it unique to beliefs about biblical literalism. Treating the Bible as serious and significant can include other faith-based approaches to the Bible.

Byas reads 'the Bible as a diverse set of voices using a diverse number of literary devices to share diverse experiences of God'. This perspective sees the Bible as not being the sole way of exploring relationships with God and as being a literary source of wisdom to be read appreciating its 'ancient, ambiguous and diverse' context and origins.

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[56] Episode 247: Enns and Byas, *The Bible for Normal People*.

Responses to these snapshots

These responses from different decades in different settings with different themes all highlight aspects of understandings and levels of awareness that invite inclusion and community rather than isolation and domination.

Hans Bürki

Bürki's narrative as an International Fellowship of Evangelical Students leader during my brief contact with him in the mid-1970s and in this 1967 article radically contrasts the ecclesiastical and religious agendas that were evident within the AFES and its dominant and controlling Sydney Anglican ethos.

Language about symphonic-miraculous being, affinity, coherence, universal communion and creational interdependence and inter-relatedness was very different to discourse about belonging or not belonging according to one's allegiance to pre-determined theological and organisational systems.

Two papers by Allen Goddard provide many helpful insights into Hans Bürki's thinking.[57] Goddard states that

> The modern, liberal Cartesian idea of the rational autonomous self is an impoverished notion of human being when compared to the relational and mystical richness accorded to the human person in the biblical anthropology of antiquity. … Bürki's three papers challenged Christians in the Cold War era of scientific, technocratic certainty, to break with their culture of liberal individualism and recover the biblical, holistic ethics of the anthropology of antiquity.[58]

Goddard believes that Bürki's *implicit* ideas about creatureliness and soul align well with 'the Trinitarian and eschatological assumptions of the earliest Christian anthropology in Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyons'. Goddard states that they assumed that humanity's destiny is shared with creation's destiny through Christ, 'in God's ultimate *recapitulation* of all things through the Holy Spirit'.

Goddard also believes that Bürki's *explicit* ideas about creatureliness and soul 'were counter-cultural for the 1970s milieu of ebullient technocracy and secularity' as that environment was not 'grounded in [the] eschatological hope' of humanity and creation being 'ultimately reconciled through Christ'.

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[57] Allen Goddard, 'Hans Ferdinand Bürki's Challenge to a Church Accommodating Modernity: An Invitation to Creatureliness,' *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. November (2015): 91–109; 'Hans Ferdinand Bürki in Retrospect Theology as Spirituality: Through the Lens of Memory,' https://www.academia.edu/12325597/Hans_Ferdinand_Bürki_in_Retrospect_Theology_as_Spirituality_Through_the_Lens_of_Memory.

[58] Cf. Ellul, *Politics of God and the Politics of Man, The*; *Meaning of the City, The*.

Goddard thirdly believes, citing Richard Bauckham and N.T. Wright, that Bürki's anthropology pre-empted aspects of 'the contemporary struggle to find more congruent, interdisciplinary, nuanced and mystical understandings of human identity'.

Bürki's focus on creatureliness as 'ontological powerlessness', as our not having life of ourselves but by being human (and so receiving dignity and identity) before God points to a person's fullness coming from '*being* full of hope rather than *having* hope'.[59]

It is with this background that Goddard profiles Bürki's *The Symphony of Being*. Goddard believes Bürki wrote in the tradition of mystical rather than systematic theology and so addressed

> the heart, the whole person in the whole of life, to deepen desire for communion with God, to inspire faith for encounter with God, and to heighten awareness of humanity's creaturely frailty and need for grace.[60]

Goddard, in another paper on Hans Bürki, outlines aspects of what he calls 'a remarkable career of four decades'. Goddard claimed that Bürki was widely remembered for his 'mystical yet practical spirituality'. Goddard quotes Evelyn Underhill's definition of a Christian mystic as someone

> 'for whom God and Christ are not merely objects of belief, but living facts experimentally known at first hand' and involving 'a life based on this conscious communion with God.[61]

Goddard highlights what he saw as Bürki's insistence on integrating 'faith and ethics' and 'theology and experience' and on seeing academic disciplines as part of an inter-related whole. One aspect of this approach to Bürki's involvement with tertiary students is seen in a quote Goddard provides from Bürki's own journaling:

> I try to recall my impressions and am thankful for the believing students, their cordiality and affection, their sincere desire to be a witness in their lives in the university and above all the knowledge of their suffering that so little has been accomplished so far. The Christian in-breeding which I met afflicts me. This creates an unreal Christianity which is a hindrance to those who are seeking Christ. At each place at least one has broken through the wall to a first grappling with the truth which is Christ.[62]

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[59] Goddard, 'Hans Ferdinand Bürki's Challenge to a Church Accommodating Modernity: An Invitation to Creatureliness.', 5.

[60] Ibid., 11.

[61] Goddard, 'Hans Ferdinand Bürki in Retrospect Theology as Spirituality: Through the Lens of Memory'., 1. Cf. Hunt, *Trinity, The: Insights from the Mystics*.

[62] Goddard, 'Hans Ferdinand Bürki in Retrospect Theology as Spirituality: Through the Lens of Memory'., 4.

Goddard also highlights what he called a second theme after discussing reconciliation: Bürki's tendency to confront what he saw as 'second-hand cultural Christianity'.[63]

These two themes were evident in my brief after-work evening encounter with Hans Bürki. I found his confrontation of me in a small group meeting unhelpful and unsettling as he for some reason saw me as unaligned with his dialogue. Whatever happened, I remain grateful for our meeting and appreciative of many of his insights – especially given my experiences of what I saw as Christian inbreeding. I have repeatedly found that life seen through parish rectory or church manse windows or from inside a Christian school classroom, staffroom or office looks remarkably different to the way life works from the perspectives gained by laypeople working and living in the broader community (even when they are deeply involved in and committed to Christian organisations).

Ubiratan D'Ambrosio

D'Ambrosio presented this paper in 1984, just as the earliest 8-bit personal computers were becoming available in educational, commercial and home environments. Local area networks were very few and the internet and mobile devices were not available. Our home at the time was less than 150 km from Adelaide and lacked a 24-hour telephone service when we first moved there.

D'Ambrosio's claims about rapid technological change and mathematics are hard to calibrate accurately without documenting what it meant to teach mathematics and to provide educational leadership when digital technologies mainly involved pocket scientific calculators and mailing packs of punch or bubble cards for mainframe processing. His mention of the status of mathematics education and its societal impacts still challenges those who see mathematics as an abstract, culturally independent and objective discipline.

His contextual focus on mathematics education has parallels in theological narratives, especially where theologians and ministers – from conservative to progressive – profile themselves as above culture and divinely authorised.

D'Ambrosio's cyclic model connecting reality, individuals and action leading to changed reality further impacting individuals and their subsequent actions provides a hermeneutical lens through which not only to read Scripture but to read theology and to reflect on pastoral practices and Christian education.

D'Ambrosio referenced the hierarchical ways by which our actions move from individuals to groups to cultures and transcultural activities. When ecclesiastical systems and leaders act to repress these movements by decrees, domination and distancing, their power narratives can be expected to suffocate growth and inhibit

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[63] Ibid., 5.

maturity. Their language, in my experience, readily becomes unwelcoming, maligning and accusative while they seek to maintain their profiles and positions against the cultural tides around them.

D'Ambrosio's insights into 'knowledge as action' references the way leaders can use their status to silence criticism and negate dialogue and debate by withholding and concealing fact-based information and excluding access.

If, as D'Ambrosio claimed, life and action are intertwined, and knowing is two-dimensionally conceived through the technologies generated by artistic and scientific endeavours, then ossified and rigid ecclesiastical views of the Bible and churches may easily cause disaffection, disintegration and decay.

What way forward did D'Ambrosio suggest for mathematics education – and what follows for those who look for meaning and purpose through theological and pastoral teaching and learning activities? *What lessons are there from his analysis for personal, small group, local community and larger corporate contexts?*

D'Ambrosio spoke of the way media impacts the strategies and models we experience when learning, informing and codifying – all core activities for religious educators, as is evident from the development of the Bible and the emergence of ancient methods of writing and recording ideas.

D'Ambrosio's claims about cultural diversity affecting 'modes of thought, jargon, codes, interests, motivation, myths' and constructing 'very definitive cultural roots, modes of production, modes of poverty, class conflicts, sense of social security, human rights and so on' need careful consideration in theological education and pastoral ministry settings. His claim that these factors 'comprise society, but are usually ignored in mathematics education' could apply regarding the way the Scriptures are read and understood.

His conclusion, with its profound insights, is in my opinion, more pertinent today than ever. Christian educators should, perhaps, ask the 'which theology' question in D'Ambrosio's context:

> Are we interested in the relationship between learned mathematics and society, or between ethno-mathematics and society, where 'ethnos' comes into the picture as the modern and very global concept of ethno both as race and/or culture, which implies language, codes, symbols, values attitudes and so on, and which naturally implies science and mathematical practices.

Rather than liberal-progressive, evangelical-conservative or Anglo-Catholic forms of fundamentalism with their absolute beliefs about the absolute power of their ecclesiasticism – and the absolute power they demand because of their absolute beliefs – a radical willingness to consider the ethno-theologies of those who

understand and live at least somewhat aligned with D'Ambrosio's vision could be embraced.[64]

D'Ambrosio's message influenced my attempts to participate in Christian communities and to understand the Scriptures. As something of an ethno-theologian, I wanted to participate actively in creative and constructive 'ministries' while simultaneously working as an educational leader in the public education system. I found that the substantial adverse and ungrateful feedback I received from leaders demanding the right to operate using their coercive, subversive, stealthy, silent and simplistic *Simon Says* pedagogies and practices made the viability of remaining in their environments increasingly untenable.[65]

Meredith Lake

Lake explores the Bible's 'sacredness, authority, interpretation and meaning' in terms of globalisation, culture and theology.[66] The Bible, from her research perspective, changes forms depending on the context in which it exits.

The globalising Bible

The globalising Bible in its Australian context could be framed as a resource used to impose European imperialism on everyone from convicts to the indigenous nations. I have seen considerable evidence of this imperialistic colonising project and the way it favours powerful and privileged *men*. The suppression of women is then used to intimidate men who choose to dissent from the dominant discourse of these theological and cultural elites.

This colonising project was particularly evident in my second season of AFES involvement and in my contact with Anglo-Catholic and pragmatic and pietistic Baptist leaders in other contexts including NCPI. Several Uniting Church progressive and evangelical ministers similarly used various forms of intimidation in seeking to enforce their hierarchical domination.

My experience was that these behaviours indicated that the Bible was being read by leaders as legitimising their power by their alignment of themselves with God and by discarding prophetic voices in the Old Testament, the Gospel accounts of Jesus' conflicts with the establishment and the apostolic experiences profiled in the

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[64] I am also reminded of books like Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (United States: Harper and Row, 1972); Hunter III, *Celtic Way of Evangelism, The: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again*. Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Maryknoll, New York, USA: SCM Press, 1982).

[65] See also Don Priest, *Pastor, the Teacher, and the School, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1987); *Effective and Innovative Educational Leadership Relating to Implementing Digital Technologies in Schools*; *Educational, Social and Theological Themes in Proverbs 1–9*; *Living in Love and Freedom*; *Learning to Love Wisdom*; 'Rituals and Renewal,' *Forum 69: A Magazine for Lutheran Graduates* Volume 9, no. 6 (March 1978): 12–15. Also, Frankl, *Will to Meaning, The*, 50ff.

[66] Lake, *Bible in Australia, The*, 3, 4.

book of Acts and the epistles. These voices and accounts were, at best, applied to 'other' contexts beyond their own.

The globalising Bible has been too often morphed into a localising Bible used to impose boundaries and to restrict learning within its ideological positions – positions that seem to be shaped by the leaders' imperialistic and colonising agendas. In other words, the Bible is used as a cultural tool which has been wielded for cultural purposes suitable to dominant systems of religious beliefs.

The Bible and culture

This cultural agenda, from my perspective, has been and continues to be self-serving and self-defeating. It is self-serving by assisting the transfer of power within communities to those culturally emmeshed with the group's worldviews. It is self-defeating because this agenda becomes a negative and reactionary narrative suiting those who want to prove their credentials by exaggerating their group's boundary conditions – for example, in attitudes to women's ministry. It also acts as a role model of ways in which counter narratives can be developed by those outside of these religious environments.

By so persistently acting in self-promoting and self-defeating ways, the Bible's prominence as a cultural reference point and as a great, civilising text is systematically dismantled. This deconstruction is hastened by fundamentalist and conservative profiles which focus on using the Bible in ways that disregard and dismiss historical and literary research. Narratives about creation and eschatology, the environment, the welfare of women and related issues, economic distribution, indigenous peoples and refugees that are built on selected texts serve this self-absorbed and self-defeating process.

The broader cultural question, from my observation, remains largely unanswered both within more mainstream and progressive communities and within society outside of Christian churches. This question relates to what legacy will be seen to have been left by the Bible's presence in Australian society and what, if any, impact it will be accepted as having in the future.

The theological Bible and the life of faith

Colonising and cultural aspects of the Bible's place in Australian society shape and are shaped by the 'theological Bible' and the devotional Bible. The former defines group identity and provides interconnectedness with global contexts, linking local researchers internationally. The devotional Bible also exists in and is enhanced by global networks. Worship in this context can create opportunities for power narratives that exclude dissent and generate the kinds of groupthink already implied.

I see the brightest light regarding the place of the Bible in Australian society in theological education and research. It is in this context that local church

powerplays are more remote and where learners and researchers may find informed dialogue with other disciplines. These conversations might enable global interactions beyond colonising and overbearing authoritarian structures and might facilitate cultural and educational insights that inform awareness of ancient cultures as well as our own.

Other Bibles

Globalising, cultural, theological and devotional considerations are not distinct but inter-relational and interdependent. Lake's analysis invites thoughtful reflection on a wide variety of adjectives that can be used about the Bible in society – descriptions that link in various ways with her three main themes. Her book takes up many of these invitations as she considers different eras and contexts. It suggests that her research is important in developing ongoing understanding of the changes that individuals experience over time in reading the Bible as well as in being aware of the ways national and community attitudes develop and alter. It may be possible to consider an 'educational Bible' where mutual, open and informed dialogue can evoke a fresh awareness of and admiration for the rich tapestry of insights contained in these ancient, sacred writings.

Christopher Frechette and Elizabeth Boase

It is not hard to find someone who has experienced significant difficulty, distress and dismay, even though they and those with them may not call their situations traumatic. The biblical narrative turns from an initial declaration of non-dominating dominion designed to facilitate preservation and prosperity in their created home-environment to a twisted and tormenting account of intentional murder in a power-dominated deceptive, duplicitous and deceitful sibling relationships. Death and destruction in the context of hope and anticipation are intrinsic to the human story in every generation. These realities make some sense of biblical laments which ascribe to God qualities that are not seen as appropriate.

Frechette and Boase's introduction provides valuable insights that assist in moving away from Christian triumphalism and in avoiding despair about life's inevitable difficulties. By considering ways in which hermeneutics associated with personal and group trauma is studied, some of the personal psychological and community sociological efforts to achieve resilience can be better understood. Making sense of and finding meaning in situations where sense and meaning seem to be obliterated involves forming narratives about these inexpressible experiences.

Resilience includes replacing toxic narratives with ones that re-establish some sense of well-being and security while not diminishing the distressful nature of what happened. The inappropriate use of power invariably includes efforts to generate shame and blame and so divert attention away from unwelcome and unacceptable actions.

Frechette and Boase identify the paradoxical pain associated with this process. Finding words for inexpressible trauma and its associated toxicity can seem as impossible as it is essential. They recognize that group support facilitates this learning journey both in finding language that gives account for the dismantling that toxicity brings and the creation of expressions that outline recovery processes.

This lived experience can be a positive one as it may open new sensitivities regarding the biblical text. Frechette and Boase mention that it can assist in understanding where the biblical texts do not provide insights or answers and ways in which they use various rhetorical techniques in this context.

I find Granofsky's emphasis on the role of language in creating safety and distance helpful, as is his identification of fragmentation, regression and reunification as aspects of traumatic experiences. Westermann's thoughts on lament similarly assist by naming the impossibility of silence – something perpetrators, abusers and their supporters are usually desperate to achieve.

Creating a trauma narrative is therefore vital for groups and individuals if they are to re-establish resilience and to relate afresh in new contexts. These narratives – like those in the ancient biblical texts – may give expression to insights that are unique to those suffering trauma and which may not always portray God in the most positive and acceptable ways. These accounts do however give faithful testimony to the anguish, distress and dismay experienced by those overwhelmed by suffering, tragedy or other awful events.

Frechette and Boase's linkage of these processes with sacred and ritualized activities in safe and shared spaces further highlights the hideous and perverse nature of spiritual abuse inside any community – including Christian churches and related organisations.

Jared Byas

Byas highlights boundary conditions that work both ways. I have, for example, been unhelpfully called a fundamentalist and a progressive in different situations.

There is, in my opinion, benefit in people outside a given group accepting that those participating in that group may not agree with all or any of the group's boundary conditions. A related problem may well be reactive power-based actions by group leaders that demean, denigrate, marginalise and exclude rather than encourage and acknowledge affirming levels of diversity.

I appreciate aspects of Byas' view of Bible-reading. It seems to me that the biblical writers, editors and compilers were aiming to develop a variety of somewhat cohesive narratives that conveyed theological and social ethical wisdom about living in redemptive, restorative and creation aligned ways across diverse eras of history and geography, in a range of social and political economies, and in ecclesiastical climates that hopefully nurtured rather than rejected this wisdom.

Perspectives and applications

These perspectives and applications were written at different times with their mainly meditative, contemplative and devotional themes primarily relating to the reasons they were prepared.

Thoughts on biblical hermeneutics

Introduction

Hermeneutics are concerned with the way we interpret and understand the Scriptures, and so with knowing and living out the intended reality of what they convey. They are the way we derive meaning from the text.

Christians affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Word incarnate, is present in our lives, actions and identities, including in the words we say and write. If our hermeneutics are rich and informed by God's presence, then life will radiate from us through our words and actions (cf. 1 John 2:4–6). Pursuing appropriate hermeneutics is part of our God-given longing to live in and share something of the fullness of the word of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Hermeneutics are associated with exegesis, with an understanding of the text. Exegesis is aided by a working knowledge of the ancient Greek and Hebrew languages and by its historical context.

Biblical hermeneutics assume there is a meaning that the writer, inspired at some level by God, intends to convey. Searching for biblical hermeneutics assumes that God, as the source of all truth, speaks through and in the Scriptures that God has inspired. They therefore assume that any meaning we may derive has value in so far as it conveys something of the intended meaning that God wants understood. Searching for biblical hermeneutics is a longing to have God speak to us and a hope that we understand what God is saying.

Biblical hermeneutics are more than a rational attempt to obtain meaning in something that once was perfect and can still be accessed by simply using the right languages, cultural settings and original manuscripts. As we read and meditate on the text and consider these understandings, the Holy Spirit is with us so that we may receive something of God's intended meaning. This means that any fruitful approach to discerning meaning in the Scriptures is an act of worship; even as the Spirit leads us in every moment of our lives!

Hermeneutics are linked with *homiletics*. Some traditions tend to sacralise shared messages as the word of God at the expense of all other incarnational speaking.

Relational knowledge

Any interpretation of Scripture has, by nature of the process, already asked a question as it approaches the text. Interpreters (and readers of any interpretation)

may not consciously be aware of this process, but it is useful to consider questions implicit in any interpretation. When we come across scriptural interpretations that do not sit easily within our frameworks, we may find that assumptions relating to the issue being discussed are worth clarifying.

There are various questions we may be asking as we approach a text. *Why* questions may include: Why is there evil in the world? Why did God approve of such and such an action? *How* questions may include: How and when was the earth formed? How long did it take? *What* questions may include: What does this mean about people who have no meaningful knowledge of biblical truth? *Where* and *when* questions may include: Where and when do (or do not) other ancient resources indicate that the Israelites left Egypt?

Each of these questions and their answers may be profitable but underpinning them is a *Who* question. If we evade or ignore this question, then we are in danger of dismissing the one whom the authors, editors and compilers of the biblical canon believe has purposed to be revealed to us. Focusing on the *Who* question also considers these authors, editors and compilers as well as the people to whom they refer! It is like reading a letter from a loved one and not considering the one who wrote the letter or those for whom it was written. It is worth recalling the opening verses of the Gospel of John and the books of Hebrews and Revelation in this context.

A hermeneutic spiral

A hermeneutic spiral describes a process for understanding a text. It refers to the idea that one's understanding of an entire text develops by reference to selected parts and one's appreciation of each part grows by reference to the whole passage. Neither the whole text nor any selected part can be adequately understood without reference to the other part. Spiralised interpretation does not make it impossible to interpret texts. Rather, in the dynamics of a paradox, the meaning of the text is known with and through various contexts; hence it is more like an upward and outward spiral co-working with an inward and downward one.

Text and context

Returning afresh to the text after prayerful and meditative consideration even when we think we know something of what it means can be helpful. This process can help us avoid building on concepts that may be inconsistent with the text. It is helpful for us to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct our insights and appreciations by accessing commentaries and other resources.

Our interpretative processes can aim to reach beyond a simple reading of the text in order to bring out something richer of the fullness of God's revelation to us and other people. Setting texts in their historical and cultural setting and reflecting on what God is saying in the light of these factors is a challenging and rewarding

process. Being self-aware of the ways in which we have implicit biases resulting from our own circumstances and history is also significant.

A common learning method sees the process of interpretation as a move from raw data to information, from information to knowledge, from knowledge to meaning, and from meaning to wisdom. All parts of this enriching process are like another spiral, integrated together to gather understandings and so enhance our hermeneutical journey. These processes highlight the importance of ongoing connections between discerning wisdom and the initial stage of grappling with the text. Our hermeneutical journey is a continually developing journey. It is not so much a destination or an arrival but a travelling during which time we pause to gain some sense of the scenery – for which we are grateful, and which informs our further explorations and delights.

Hermeneutics can be understood as a process of interpretation that occurs from the inside-out as well as from the outside-in, and from down-side up as well as upside-down. We can be sensitive to carrying our pre-conceived ideas into our looking at the text and be aware that we are unable to suspend completely our already formed concepts, prejudices, biases and frameworks, however correct or tested they may appear to be to us and those with whom we naturally share and experience life, learning and worship.

Approaches to reading Scripture

One direction

Our life stories inform the way we read and learn and help determine our approaches to Scripture and faith. Our ethnicity, gender, social and technological status, and vocational and educational backgrounds are factors that interact together in different ways in various circumstances. Since many aspects of these backgrounds impact implicitly, we may only become aware of them and so more able to articulate and adapt to them as time passes and as the spaces in which we live alter.

The difficulties we encounter often redirect us: in other words, we move from being *in tension* about various issues to *intention* about the range of ways we live. One framework for working through biblical themes or passages involves the following elements:

• Introducing ourselves to the narrative, and the narrative to us, and other thinkers to the narrative.

• Discovering by intentional engagement with chosen resources something that is new, renews, revises and/or reverses us.

• Reflecting on our personal and community learning to determine re-directions we may want to explore in the future.[67]

Two dimensions

We approach life from different perspectives which influence our church life and theological learning and prioritise our beliefs and behaviours. Various levels of engagement with context occur creating an ongoing nexus and praxis between belief and behaviour that can help facilitate community participation.[68] Belief-oriented and behaviour-oriented approaches may consider biblical passages and related history, study themes and concepts, and explore ways in which we understand passages as we work through issues affecting our destinies. Meta-narratives can help us understand biblical passages and themes and enable higher orders of engagement. These insights help shape our beliefs and behaviours just as our beliefs and behaviours affect our learning.

Behaviour-oriented and belief-oriented approaches may also consider social, cultural, technological and educational contexts in which communities explore identities and seek to flourish. The significant narratives that emerge enable strategies and risks to be better calibrated and identified, so facilitating more sustainable and significant outcomes to be achieved.

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[67] Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom* uses a version of this framework.

[68] I am not thinking of belief in purely cognitive terms or behaviour as solely affective action.

Three dispositions

God's presence, provision and promises inter-relate to provide stances or dispositions that we can adopt as we share together or as we meditate personally on the Scriptures:[69]

• Knowing God's love and worshipping God with thanks.

• Trusting God in times of trouble, trial, torment, tragedy and triumph.

• Living in hope of God's promised fullness for his people.

Four domains

Church communities may work implicitly or explicitly with one or more of the following strategic priorities or domains. Organisational leadership may use these domains in preparing vision and mission statements, in working out operational priorities or goals, and in implementing targeted activities.

Strategic development at personal or corporate community levels involves various forms of planned intention, risk recognition and prioritisation of active relationships. When reading the Bible and engaging in theological thinking some questions we might ask ourselves and each other include:

What am I learning from the passage being studied that helps facilitate

• a life-long educational focus that enriches our lives in community?

• sharing with others in ways that enhance agreed caring priorities?

• embracing others meaningfully beyond our immediate boundaries?

• worshipping together in ways that recognise human maturity includes spiritual aspects involving devotion, contemplation and meditation?

Five discernments

Each of the following discernments suggest a range of questions that are worth considering in the above contexts when reading Scripture and thinking theologically. These questions may not all apply to any given passage, but they provide possible starting points:

Scripture

In what ways does this passage of Scripture reveal a human story of the people of God exploring the person of God in the presence of God?

• What is the literary context? What structures and forms of language and literary genre are involved, and in what direction is the narrative moving?

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[69] The Discovery parts of section 2 of Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom* use these dispositions.

- What is the rhetorical context? In what settings was the literature likely to be read and heard, and in what ways does this affect the text?

- What are the historical, cultural and social contexts of the text? In what places and times was it written and written about? What is known about authorship and what technologies were available to the authors?

- What is the canonical context? What can be considered revelation, information or education? Are cultural, social and religious settings to be assumed as authentic components of the revelation discourse?

In what ways does this passage of Scripture reveal the Word of God by the Spirit of God to and for the people of God?

- What does this passage of Scripture help us understand about the writer, the original audience and those involved in the story?

- What do we learn from this passage of Scripture about their views of God's person and presence?

- In what ways does this passage of Scripture help us understand suffering, death, conflict and other difficulties?

- In what ways does this passage of Scripture help us understand joy, prosperity, peace, hope, love and other delights?

God

In what ways does this passage of Scripture reveal God as triune with us, incarnate among us and eternal beyond us?

What does this passage reveal about God's

- persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

- properties or attributes: e.g. love, holiness, righteousness, goodness and truth?

- presence: time and place?

Creation

In what ways does this passage of Scripture reveal the *then*, *now* and *next* of God as creator and sustainer of God's creation?

What does this passage reveal about creation as

- God's good gift of holy love and loving holiness?

- our homeland, requiring sustainability, nurture and welfare?

- human family and community, living peacefully in reciprocal mutually submissive relationships?

- sanctuary for all living creatures?

Destination

In what ways does this passage of Scripture reveal the *now* and the *next* of God's purposes in God's creation; God's 'on earth as it is in heaven'?

What does this passage reveal about our destination

- being reached by God's personal grace and mercy?

- drawing us towards its joy and peace in hope, faith and love?

- revealing God's ongoing presence as re-creator and redeemer?

Humanity

In what was does this passage of Scripture reveal humanity as together and mutual, as reconciled and renewed by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit?

What does this passage reveal about humanity as created and redeemed to be

- inclusive and diverse, living with decency and dignity?

- together as one family in racial-ethnic harmony, socio-economic unity and ecclesiastical dialogue?

- in mutual submission as male and female, rather than in or under gender-specified hierarchical domination?

- liberated by Jesus' gospel so that power, privilege, position and prominence 'will not be so among you' (Matthew 20:26; cf. Mark 10:43; Luke 22:26)?

Six delights

In reading Scripture, are we free by God's mercy and grace to enjoy life together in peace and harmony by

- reflecting on our own contexts and relationships?

- respecting the original cultures?

- reviewing the text?

- recognising the meaning?

- refining our understanding?

- responding to our present context and relationships?

Preparation processes

Everybody approaches preparation for formal and informal conversations in different ways. This section includes some thoughts about the ways I have worked when preparing more formal presentations.

Identifying the main ideas

When a topic or passage is given to me, I reflect on the topic and read the passage to identify an initial idea of how I might share my thoughts. If I am nominating my own theme, it usually arises from my knowledge of the context where I will be sharing and the people with whom I will relate, as well as with my own life experience. I look at the selected passage for a big picture and related primary pastoral point.

Exploring the key passage or passages

I use a holistic process, moving through each of several phases, revisiting and reviewing, as well as developing and proceeding. I use printed, digital and online resources, especially in exploring aspects that significantly relate to the original languages. I benefit from opportunities for dialogue in Christian communities. I aim to consider …

The text

- Read the words and grammatical structure to determine content.

- Identify resources that provide important information to improve my understanding of the text.

- Identify significant references to other biblical passages to further my understanding of the text.

The divine and human relationships

- Explore *why* the account was written from evidence of the author's intentions from inside the story and as stated for those who read it.

- Determine *who* is mentioned in the narrative and their relationships and interactions as well as the *what*, *where* and *when* of the relevant events.

The social and historical context

- Examine the social discourse that develops and the community and culture involved, especially in terms of substantial biblical themes like conquest, covenant and communion.

The present implications

- Consider the pastoral, practical and personal dimensions in our links with the original writing and story across time and space, and culture and context.

Preparing background notes

This is an iterative process where I aim to produce a coherent and compact written resource. My understanding of the relevant text is improved by this activity and the way that I plan to present my thoughts becomes clearer.

I attempt to identify the key ideas so that those who listen to me or read my notes can more readily access my thinking as well as follow up other points later for their own personal reflection. My notes can usually be summarised from their stated headings, with the aim of generating a simple relational flow for listeners and readers.

Preparing presentation

Once my notes are prepared, I like to step back and reflect on whether I can summarise my message in a few short paragraphs and with a main title phrase. I go through my notes to highlight and/or produce a dot-point summary. This 'walk-through' helps me de-clutter without delving too deeply into detail more relevant for a longer paper. A digital presentation may assist listeners in accessing the main text and/or identifying my key thoughts. These processes usually lead to further editing and refining of my thoughts and so help enable my presentation to be better integrated.

I aim to meet with the other leaders to construct connections which can help facilitate an integrated worship experience. I usually meet someone afterwards who wants further dialogue about my presentation and offer them my notes.

Post-preparation reviewing

I review my notes with the aim of leaving them as a celebration of my learning journey and as a thanksgiving for a unique living opportunity to participate and share in community or dialogue. Although I rarely share the same presentation again, the conceptual framework built each time provides a new building block that helps me grow. This step is important to me as it enables me to focus on the substance of what I have shared and to contextualise more appropriately the feedback public ministry brings.

If my presentation was recorded, I aim to listen to it to look for any relational flow and check my use of language, etc., as well as learn from any mistakes.

Where considered feedback is provided, affirmative or critical, I try to engage in dialogue. My aim is to clarify, where I can, and to resolve any relational or theological difficulties that may have emerged.

Personal values

I aim to

- let the passage speak for itself and let the author's intention be clear.

- have the text visible and alive, without surrounding it with too much in the way of personal anecdote or external rationalisation.

- avoid speaking descriptively *about* God/humanity, preferring to speak personally *of* God/people.

- avoid speaking of love, grace, etc. as abstract categories, concepts or commodities, preferring to see them in personal and relational terms.

- avoid putting people under obligations to improve their piety (by bible reading, prayer and ethical living) or to improve their practice (through church involvement, social welfare and evangelism).

- treat all people with dignity and decency without denigrating those who are seen to be, or who see themselves as, outside of the church.

- share in the revelation of God's trinitarian being and who we are as beneficiaries of God's creational and restorative actions, and so inform, affirm and encourage richer, renewed lives.

- see myself in the congregation as a listener, engaged in my ongoing life as a layperson who has worked in the broader civic community.

2 Corinthians 3:17–4:18, along with other passages, has consistently informed my thinking about teaching and preaching.

Rethinking Bible reading and hermeneutics

It is worth asking ourselves about our purposes in reading the Bible and our understanding of hermeneutics before engaging in these activities. Attempts at answering these questions might focus on concerns about the historical and cultural backgrounds of the texts. They might prioritise exploring ways of understanding and interpreting the text in its original settings while also hoping to apply these insights to contemporary realities. They might centre on concerns regarding nominated issues or on being more informed and aware at a general social or political level.

Reading the Bible and considering hermeneutical issues might come from wanting to grow spiritually and to connect with other like-minded people and their communities. Motivations might also result from wanting to be better placed to relate to people who have other faith or belief frameworks.

I covered a range of resources in *Reflections on a personal journey.* I add here some brief insights from other resources. Further explorations about reading the Bible and understanding hermeneutics are readily available.[70]

Scot McKnight: *The Blue Parakeet*[71]

McKnight's book is helpful as he shares something of his own journey in seeking to answer what he regards as basic questions about the way he and people around him were reading the Bible. He was concerned about the selective use of the Scriptures to justify pre-existing points of view. He nominated three ways among many for reading the Bible.

It might, for example, be read to retrieve biblical ideas and practices. Doing this might lead to the discovery that this approach is not the biblical way!

> The biblical way is the ongoing adoption of the past and adaptation to new conditions and to do this in a way that is *consistent with and faithful to the Bible.*[72]

The Bible might be read through tradition to avoid misreading it. McKnight distinguishes between traditionalism, which he dislikes, and being aware of the ways in which the church has always read the Bible. This type of reading involves returning to the Bible to understand it by attempting to retrieve its original

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[70] E.g. Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Academic, 2009); John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis, Third Edition: A Beginner's Handbook* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

[71] Scot McKnight, *Blue Parakeet, The: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 2016).

[72] Ibid., 29.

meanings. Reading using this approach assists renewal processes without readers becoming fossilised in their understandings and approaches.

These considerations shape his third approach, an approach which goes back to the Bible to move forward through the church 'in our days in our ways'. He summarises this approach as Story, Listening and Discerning.[73]

John Stackhouse: *Partners in Christ*[74]

Stackhouse has, in my opinion, not only succeeded in his intention to provide a conservative case for egalitarianism; he has provided a helpful resource for those who want to improve their understanding of hermeneutical approaches.

Empathy and acknowledgement

Stackhouse begins by indicating that he respects and acknowledges that people have different points of view based on careful consideration of the issues. He emphasises that proceeding on the basis that those with whom we might disagree are 'either wicked or witless' or 'are immoral morons' is unhelpful.[75]

Assumptions and issues

After seeking to be empathic and considerate, Stackhouse seeks to identify his assumptions and terminology. He then outlines several significant issues that he sees existing in contemporary debates and highlights that some terms carry complex and multiple meanings.

Approaches and concerns

Stackhouse next outlines what he sees as three common approaches to the questions he is discussing. These include biblicism, cultural conformity or nonconformity and spiritual intuition. He finds it 'quite remarkable' that people approach 'exegetical and historical issues' assuming we all reason theologically in the same way and that 'there are no important methodological questions to sort out first'.[76]

He states that the basic task is not to have final answers but to make the best decisions after studying the Bible 'with the help of the Holy Spirit and the church', and then responding 'in faith, obedience, and gratitude'.[77]

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[73] Ibid., 34, 37.

[74] John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Partners in Christ* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015).

[75] Ibid., 10.

[76] Ibid., 17.

[77] Ibid., 32.

Wisdom and methodology

He shares that his 'hermeneutical wisdom' includes identifying intellectual *and* ethical issues.[78] *Doing* theology well means being as open-minded as possible and choosing interpretations that make 'the most sense of the most texts and especially the important ones'. He is disturbed about the extent to which churchgoers 'settle for such simplistic methods that are so clearly vulnerable to manipulation by one's own or others' interests'.[79]

Stackhouse adds two more hermeneutical principles. He highlights both the importance and the dangers associated with what he calls control texts. He identifies these regulatory references as ones which are used as foundations on which beliefs and understandings are built. This construction process is described in terms of induction; of moving from the particular to the general.

An alternative approach is described as a hermeneutical circle or spiral – as a dialectical movement between primary and secondary passages by which initial assumptions are investigated and refined. Rather than using induction based on control texts, Stackhouse prefers starting with a hypothesis and recognising relevant preconceptions and limitations. Having outlined his paradigm and its likely outcomes (chapters 1–5), he then proceeds to explore his theme using this framework (chapters 6ff).

Kevin Giles: *The Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity*[80]

In a chapter titled *Doing Evangelical Theology*, Giles outlines some of the reasons he sees contributing to his assessment that leading evangelical theologians were able to convince the wider evangelical community 'to accept a hierarchical doctrine of the Trinity' that was contrary to the 'creeds and confessions of the church'. This doctrine was then used to provide 'the primary theological basis for the subordination of women'.

Scripture alone

Giles first identifies claims that the Bible provides the ultimate truth and that what the Bible says about God is firm and final. Problems with these axioms emerge when statements written in a different culture in another era of time do not adequately answer current questions. Guidance must inevitably be accessed by exploring what people in previous generations learned when faced with similar circumstances to those encountered in today's environments.

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[78] Ibid., 17, 27.

[79] Ibid., 31, 33.

[80] Kevin N. Giles, *Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity, The* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017).

These concerns emerge when theologians discover that the Bible does not always arrive at the same answers for certain questions. Giles references the term 'the analogy of faith' which states that any given text is not to dominate emphases from all of Scripture.[81] They also are evident when theologians realise that the Bible is silent on the *theological* or *cultural* issues they are investigating. These concerns are more significant when issues identified in the Bible are not explored using clearly identified propositions.

Giles states that Scripture is the main theological resource and source when adequate community debate and dialogue works through these kinds of dilemmas. *Sola scriptura* is not *solo Scripture* when studied this way.

Exegetical and theological tradition

Giles mentions the exegetical and theological tradition *and* church authorised traditions that do not rely on Scripture. The exegetical and theological tradition is, according to Giles, 'is nothing less than the collective wisdom of the whole Christian community, past and the present'.[82]

Reason

Reason alone is no more helpful that Scripture alone and is often calibrated alongside or against revelation. Holy Spirit enlightened reason, according to Giles, means doing theology using 'paradigm-building' approaches that attempt to develop coherent constructions of the insights researched.[83]

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[81] Ibid., 71.

[82] Ibid., 74.

[83] Ibid., 78.

Inclusion and Hierarchies

Reflections on a personal journey
Enhancing inclusion and reframing hierarchies

Assigning issues regarding gender to the margins of Christian belief and practice while preaching a gospel that supposedly includes everyone and while Christian communities endeavour to relate to and not ignore those outside of their in-groups is more than a little inconsistent. Gender issues go to the heart of the gospel and the essence of mission. Those adversely affected by gender and other forms of discrimination can reasonably ask about the credibility and integrity of the contexts where only privileged men preach and lead churches.

Those marginalised by patriarchal exclusions seen as theologically crucial deserve considerable empathy and care when they find themselves wondering whether the gospel, the church and God are merely unhelpful, antiquarian social and anthropological constructs that serve to protect male-dominated status quos, rather than creative truths that work for the common good of *all* humanity within and from an eternal, inclusive and affirming purpose.

While exploring Christian belief as a young tertiary student, leaders from the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students encouraged Bible reading using a three-fold pattern: what the passage says, what it means, and what it personally means. Curiously, given their concerns about the Enlightenment, this paradigm assumed a form of Enlightenment objectivity regarding biblical content determined by their privileged cultural environment. It was accompanied by a subordinated and often implicit view of hermeneutics, interpretation and application.

Some of my problems with this pattern of thinking arose from the Christian music my parents listened to and used in Sunday School settings. Alexanders' Hymnal, CSSM and Elim choruses and mainly United States 'gospel music' presented a positive and hopeful narrative of Jesus saving people by God's wonderful grace. By contrast, a World Record Club LP called *Negro (sic) Spirituals* told a different story:[84] God might have the whole world in his hands, but the river to be crossed is deep, and the need for a rescuing chariot to swing low was great. This music highlighted the ignorance of other people about their troubles and placed hope in a gospel train that would under Moses-like leadership take them to a promised land that would be heavenly by contrast to their sufferings. The hermeneutical context of the biblical writers and of white-privileged readers seemed significant.

Christenson's book, *The Christian Family*, was regarded by many people with whom we had contact in the early to mid-1970s as an authentic biblical presentation about marriage and family. Similar emphases, such as from the

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[84] *Negro Spirituals*, (Melbourne: World Record Club, ~1960).

Festival of Light, were insisted on and promoted by conservative evangelical Anglican leaders when I led a tertiary Christian group.

I was closely connected with Geoffrey Bingham's ministry from 1972–2006, including with New Creation Teaching Ministry.[85] Bingham's early books on gender and sexuality focused on male and female roles.[86] Around 1990, he wrote a doctoral thesis much of which he later included in his monthly Pastors' Studies. He adapted aspects of it in *The Profound Mystery* and *The Heavenly Vision* and later published several books detailing a range of his ecclesiological concerns developed from this research.[87]

Martin Bleby presented his views of ordination for men only and of husbands as heads of wives in several NCPI publications.[88] NCPI also republished P. T. Forsyth's *Marriage: Its Ethic and Religion* and published Greg John's *Called to Faithfulness*. David J. Engelsma's *Marriage* and John Piper's *This Momentary Marriage* provide similar theologies and approaches to ministry. Having earlier found several of Thomas Smail's books helpful, I also read *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity imaged in our Humanity*.[89] I have included edited notes and comments for two NCPI seasonal school sessions that I led which are relevant to this theme.[90]

I experienced significantly increased clerical distancing, gender discrimination and organisational control in the 2000s compared to the experiences of renewal and inclusion that I had known in earlier leadership involvement in the AFES and NCPI. I regarded these factors as contrary to the improved work practices that I

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[85] New Creation Publications Inc. (NCPI) functioned as New Creation Teaching Ministry. NCPI was not linked or aligned with any creation science groups.

[86] Geoffrey Bingham, *Role and Purpose of Man and Woman, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., nd); *God, Man & Woman in Today's World* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1986); *Man, Woman and Sexuality (2nd Ed)* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1986); *God's Glory, Man's Sexuality* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1988).

[87] '*Glory of God and Human Relationships, The: A Study in Trinitarian and Human Relationships*' (Pacific College of Graduate Studies, 1990); *Profound Mystery, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1995); *Heavenly Vision, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1994).

[88] Martin Bleby, *God-Engendered Glory! Women as Priests and Bishops?* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1998); *Power in Relationships* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 2008); *Marriage and the Good News of God* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 2010); *A Quiet Revival: Geoffrey Bingham in Life and Ministry* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 2012). (Cf. Don Priest, *A Quiet Revival Reviewed – a Response to a Quiet Revival, Geoffrey Bingham in Life and Ministry by Martin Bleby* (2022)).

[89] David J. Engelsma, *Marriage* (Grandville, MI, USA: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1998); P. T. Forsyth, *Marriage: Its Ethic and Religion* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1999); Thomas A. Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006); Greg John, *Called to Faithfulness* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 2002); John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway Books, 2009).

[90] Don Priest, *In Triune Community* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2019) contains an edited collection of nearly all my other seasonal school resources.

encountered and encouraged in my various teaching and leadership roles in the public education system over many years and in different locations.

I see an urgent need for people to be able to express their Christian beliefs in community structures, including churches, that prioritise everyone's gifting rather than assigning them to predetermined role-defined categories of race, class, economics, sociality, religious background and gender that too often preserve power-based politically and socially driven cultural patterns in the name of sound biblical thinking.

I believe power, control and exclusion are at the heart of so-called complementarian perspectives and practices. I repeatedly experienced leaders with these beliefs subordinating people by denying them voice, votes and views. Subordinates were regarded as others, objects and outcasts for whom alternative narratives were generated. These accounts usually involved hierarchies never conceding anything while assigning blame and shame to any subordinates who expressed concerns. A binary prosperity retribution agenda was used in opposite ways for leaders (super-ordinates) and subordinates with truth, transparency and trust rarely if ever mentioned. I find it virtually impossible not to conclude that racism, genderism and god-ism all sing from the same song sheets and that their story lines inevitably follow the same destructive pathways:

> Everybody knows that the war is over
> Everybody knows the good guys lost
> Everybody knows the fight was fixed
> The poor stay poor, the rich get rich
> That's how it goes
> Everybody knows
>
> …
>
> Everybody knows the deal is rotten
> Old Black Joe's still pickin' cotton
> For your ribbons and bows
> And everybody knows.[91]

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[91] Leonard Cohen, 'Leonard Cohen Files, The,' https://www.leonardcohenfiles.com/.

Since concluding my responsibilities in these groups, I have appreciated reading John Stackhouse,[92] Scot McKnight,[93] Kevin Giles,[94] *The Gender Conversation*,[95] Cynthia Long Westfall,[96] Austin Channing Brown,[97] Judith Herrin,[98] Margaret Mowczko[99] and other authors. I have also valued listening to a range of scholars and authors on Pete Enns', Scot McKnight's, N. T. Wright's and other podcasts.[100]

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[92] Stackhouse Jr., *Partners in Christ.*

[93] Scot McKnight, *Junia Is Not Alone* (Englewood, Colorado, USA: Patheos Press, 2011); *Blue Parakeet, The: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*, also see his *Kingdom Roots*. podcasts.

[94] Kevin N. Giles, *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018); *Trinity & Subordinationism, The: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002); *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006); *Better Together: Equality in Christ* (Brunswick East, Vic: Acorn Press, 2010); *Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity, The*; *Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related in Any Way?, The* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2020).

[95] Edwina Murphy and David Starling, eds., *Gender Conversation, The* (Macquarie Park, Aust: Morling Press, 2016).

[96] Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Publishing Group, 2016).

[97] Austin Channing Brown, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* (New York: Convergent, 2018).

[98] Judith Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium* (Princeton, New Jersey, USA: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[99] Marg Mowczko, 'Marg Mowczko: Exploring the Biblical Theology of Christian Egalitarianism,' https://margmowczko.com.

[100] Enns and Byas, *The Bible for Normal People*; McKnight, *Kingdom Roots*; Wright, *Ask Nt Wright Anything.*

Snapshots of some significant themes

Larry Christenson: *The Christian Family*

Christenson commences his book, *The Christian Family*, by stating that families belong to God:

> He created it. He determined its inner structure. He appointed for it its purpose and goal. By divine permission, a man and a woman may cooperate with God's purpose and become a part of it. But the home they establish remains His establishment.[101]

Families are to establish the '"Divine Order" in the home', and 'practise the presence of Jesus'.[102] This divine order is derived from 1 Corinthians 11:3 and places every family member under authority.[103] In discussing 'God's Order for Mates', Christenson comments on sex, divorce and mutual esteem, before rightly concluding that 'much of the real joy in marriage comes from *giving*, not *getting*'.[104] Ephesians 5 is cited as evidence, but the context about mutual submission is not mentioned.

The first point made by Christenson concerning 'God's Order for Wives' is that 'the wife is the link between husband and children', with her role tending 'to draw both husband and children into order'.[105] Christenson writes that submissive wives are not degraded and do not reflect a divine 'grudge against women'.[106] On the contrary, a wife's submission is based on Philippians 2:5–9 and enables '*the protection of women and the harmony of the home*'.[107] We are not told at this point what this passage means for husbands, even though Ephesians 5:25 suggests that husbands are to give themselves up in love for their wives in the same way Philippians 2:5–9 speaks of Christ sacrificing himself for us.

Women, according to Christenson, are vulnerable and need the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual protection of their husbands.[108] A husband, we are told, has primary responsibility, and stands between 'his wife and the world',[109] while the church is to care for single women. Single women are

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[101] Larry Christenson, *Christian Family, The* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA: Fountain Trust, 1971), 11.

[102] Ibid., 14.

[103] Ibid., see diagram, 17.

[104] Ibid., 30.

[105] Ibid., 32. This is apparently not seen as leadership since women are not leaders in the home! At best it must be some form of delegated leadership under the solo ultimate leadership of her husband!

[106] Ibid., 33.

[107] Ibid., 33.

[108] Ibid., 35.

[109] Ibid., 37.

apparently not capable of determining their own spiritual standing, and therefore need an intermediary to cover them.[110]

There is no discussion about whether a man has any vulnerabilities as a husband (or in being single), and what leadership his wife might have to him as his helper in this context, or what benefit might come to him from her as he subjects himself to her and helps her in various ways (cf. Ephesians 5:21).

In claiming Galatians 3:27–28 does not teach 'indiscriminate social "equality" between men and women', Christenson described it as an 'isolated text'. Paul, according to Christenson, would have been opposed to 'modern plans for introducing an equality between man and woman'.[111] Christenson develops his argument by insisting that female subordination 'is grounded upon the creation' and 'further grounded upon the fall'.[112] God's explanation in Genesis 3:16–19 of the effects of sin is a 'primitive law which has never ceased to be valid'.[113] Christenson does not appear to discuss whether the gospel might reverse any of the results of the fall.

In distinguishing between submission and servility, with submission being 'in the Lord', Christenson asserts that the husband has the final say after listening to his wife's thoughts.[114] Rather than discussing husbands behaving inappropriately and in an unwelcome manner, we are told that women are 'not normally equipped by nature to sustain … psychological and emotional pressure'.[115] The 'emancipation of women' and the 'feminisation of our culture' has, according to Christenson, led to men abdicating leadership of their families and in the church.[116] While women can apparently have leadership responsibilities, what these might be is not clear given that Christenson excludes homes and churches. Perhaps they are subordinated responsibilities under male leadership or roles in the general community.

Spiritual submission, writes Christenson, involves wives seeing Christ in their husbands, in not being rebellious and in rejoicing in their husband's authority over them – even though 'it is more common to find piety in women than in men'.[117] Resolution of all marital difficulties, especially those caused by a husband, involves a submissive wife.

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[110] Yet, note the leadership role identified earlier about drawing husband and children together!

[111] Christenson, *Christian Family, The*, 38, 39.

[112] Ibid., 39.

[113] Ibid., 39.

[114] Ibid., 41.

[115] Ibid., 45.

[116] Ibid., 45.

[117] Ibid., 51.

'God's Order for Children' centres on one issue: obedience. Obedience is necessary 'even if [the parents] are wrong'.[118] Obedience 'must be set forth and impressed upon [the children] without any exception', while questioning parental decisions is 'precocious inquisitiveness'.[119] Where criminality is involved, children are to 'arm [themselves] with trust in God, not with thoughts of rebellion'.[120] Where parents fail, parents are to ask for forgiveness so that parental authority is not undermined.

'God's Order for Parents' comprises love, discipline and teaching (based on Ephesians 6:4). Teaching is described in terms of instruction, setting rules, and being an example, with discipline backing up teaching. Discipline does not involve reasoning or education because the 'Bible does not look upon a child as basically good'.[121] Using Proverbs 13:24, we are told that the rod is the way of love. Fear is good and not to be toned down as awe or reverence.[122] Further, 'spanking' is a first response not a last one.[123] This form of discipline, including 'really hard spanking' is effective.[124]

Where disobedience is prevalent in a home it is likely that 'the mother is accustomed to [contradicting] the father, to [despising] his authority, or to [making] it void behind his back'.[125] Discipline is primarily the father's responsibility, with corporal punishment being 'God's appointed means of discipline'.[126] After discipline has been given, not before, children are to ask God for forgiveness, reinforcing his earlier view about the effects of sin. Christenson concludes this chapter with a brief section on love as listening, comfort, happiness, and time.

'God's Order for Husbands' is described as Christ-like sacrificial *agape* love (Ephesians 5:25a; Colossians 3:20). This love, according to Christenson, provides for the family, while wives who work outside the home are a 'departure' from the 'Divine Order', damage family life and carry a 'too heavy' burden.[127] The husband 'has a greater natural strength of mind' than his wife who 'is more easily

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[118] Ibid., 55, 57.

[119] Ibid., 59.

[120] Ibid., 59.

[121] Ibid., 98.

[122] Ibid., 101

[123] Ibid., 103

[124] Ibid., 107.

[125] Ibid., 110.

[126] Ibid., 112.

[127] Ibid., 127.

discouraged and dejected. God has made her that way.'[128] Meanwhile she is to carry the 'burden of the children and the management of the household'.[129] Women working outside the home are likely to be less thrifty and buy more luxuries, and so engage in a 'lust for material things' rather than fulfilling the 'Divine Order'.[130]

The most important responsibility of husbands in loving their wives is in caring for her sanctification. The husband's role is more significant in this context than that of the church minister. Christenson does not include any role for wives in assisting in the sanctification of husbands. The method suggested is to 'go the way of the cross before her' and to give himself up for her.[131] His role is his alone, a view Christenson affirms in quoting a wife who says 'we aren't made for leadership. It's a pose'.[132] Husbands are called to be tender, not harsh, and to give up 'your pride, your ego, your "rights"' in caring for their wives.[133]

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[128] Ibid. 127, 128.

[129] Ibid., 128.

[130] Ibid., 128.

[131] Ibid., 132.

[132] Ibid., 135, 136.

[133] Ibid., 139.

Geoffrey Bingham: *The Role and Purpose of Man and Woman*

Bingham's early books on gender and sexuality were: *The Role and Purpose of Man and Woman (nd, about 1980?) God, Man & Woman in Today's World, Man, Woman and Sexuality (2nd ed) (1986),* and *God's Glory, Man's Sexuality (1988)*[134].

He wrote a thesis around 1990 and later included much of it in his monthly Pastors' Studies and other books. He adapted aspects of it in *The Heavenly Vision (1994) and The Profound Mystery (1995).*[135] He later published books detailing a range of his ecclesiological concerns developed from this research.

Bingham also wrote several books on God's fatherhood.[136]

This book was his first publication of his views on this subject. He introduced it as containing a wide set of principles and practical advice. He used male-may-assume-female 'inclusivity' throughout this and all his writings.

Being a man and a woman

Chapters 1 to 4 commence with Bingham profiling the meaning of being and doing as persons, after which he addresses 'Being a man and a woman'. He states that 'man and woman constitute the image of God' and that therefore knowing God's plan for humanity is essential in adequately understanding humanity. Before outlining aspects of this divine plan, Bingham indicates that man and woman 'are essential to one another, and neither can carry out the plan without the other'. They each have personal being and 'are complementary [not opposite] to one another. Bingham wrote that 'Speaking loosely we can say woman is inherent in man' and added that their roles are defined: 'He is leader … she assists him. She is helpmeet, that is one whose help is necessary for him'.[137]

Bingham insists that mystery is different to mystique, and that

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[134] Bingham, *Role and Purpose of Man and Woman, The*; *God, Man & Woman in Today's World*; *Man, Woman and Sexuality (2nd Ed)*; *God's Glory, Man's Sexuality*. Also see *Authority and Submission of Love, The* (Blackwood: New Creation Publications Inc., 1982).

[135] '*Glory of God and Human Relationships, The: A Study in Trinitarian and Human Relationships.*'; *Heavenly Vision, The*; *Profound Mystery, The*.

[136] *I Love the Father [1st Ed]* (Victor Harbor, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1974); *Father! My Father!* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1977); *Oh, Father! Our Father!* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1983); *I Love the Father [2nd Ed]* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1990); *God and Father of Us All, The* (Coromandel East: New Creation Publications Inc., 1982). This last book was in a series with *Person and Work of Christ, The* (Blackwood, South Australia: New Creation Publications Inc., 1983, 2007); *Person and Work of the Holy Spirit, The* (Coromandel East: New Creation Publications Inc., 1985, 2009).

[137] *Role and Purpose of Man and Woman, The*, 15, 16.

there is neither equality nor inequality in this matter of male and female. Talk of equality and inequality arise out of a misunderstanding, or perhaps a rejection of the nature of creation.[138]

He then prefaces his discussion about authority by emphasising the difference between lording and serving.[139] His conclusion is clear:

> It is possible to trace a pattern of authorities in the Bible. In I Corinthians 11:3 Paul says, 'I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.' … Within communities there are elders who have authority, and within families the father is the head of the family, and the mother is honoured. From the oldest of the children down to the youngest there is a 'pecking order' which relates to seniority. Yet, in all this the question of equality or inequality is not raised. It is the question of authority. … A woman is not inferior to a man, nor a wife to her husband. A father is not greater than a mother, any more than a brother is greater than a sister. Subordination does not mean inferiority.[140]

After emphasising that man and woman are in a partnership and not in a master-servant relationship, Bingham turns to a theology of 'archetypes', where God *is* Father and not like human fathers. God's Son *is* likewise uniquely Son and Brother while God's Family *is* Family with Christ and his Bride constituting *the* Marriage.

Bingham then briefly quotes from several passages including Ephesians 1, 4 and 5 and 1 Corinthians 12 and concludes the Christ 'loved [his bride] to death', 'nourishes and cherishes her', 'gives her His fulness' and 'keeps her spotless'. As such

> He is her head. That is He is her leader. She follows His bidding. Yet she does this gladly because of His innate authority, and His compulsion of love.[141]

Bingham then moves to human marriage declaring it primarily to be a 'fellowship in function' that is vocationally and relationally expressed as well as through sexual intimacy.[142] Sexual intimacy is affirmed as good and clean, with marriage's goals chronologically focusing on childrearing.[143]

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[138] Ibid., 20.

[139] Cf. Geoffrey Bingham, *Sons of God Are the Servants of All, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1982); *True God or New Guru?* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1979).

[140] *Role and Purpose of Man and Woman, The*, 21.

[141] Ibid., 22, 23.

[142] Ibid., 23.

[143] Ibid., 27.

Marriages are formed by both partners leaving their parents with the best case being where the man and not the woman initiates this leaving and cleaving process. In exploring some of the dangers he sees, including pre-marital sexual relations, Bingham insists that 'the man is leader, the woman is his helpmeet'.[144]

Marriage relationships

Chapters 5 to 10 begin with Bingham repeating the same refrain when discussing what he calls inadequate marriage relationships. His primary focus is on husbands losing moral leadership and wives taking up 'a masculine task'.[145] After outlining some aspects of the way inadequacies impact the couple's children and parents, he emphasises the 'tremendous dynamic' that forgiveness enables. He insists that forgiveness comes from and through 'the Cross', that it applies to partners, parents, children and other people, and that

> Where there is repentance, forgiveness is offered and can be received by faith. Repentance is not merely remorse for failure but a frank recognition of the wrong done, and a change of mind towards God and one's failure.[146]

After returning to his concerns about the importance of each partner's vocations during courtship and marriage preparation, Bingham further develops his thoughts about freedom and authority in marriage. His central priority is to indicate that *hierarchical authority is primary within creation* and that *relationship issues* and *freedom* are defined in this context. He contrasts those 'whose minds are gripped by the desire for equality' and so are unable to see that male-female differences highlight 'personal being' and exclude questions of equality of inequality – questions that inevitably lead to competition.[147]

A similar verdict applies to rights. The 'indispensability' of the coming together of a man and a woman makes rights 'obviously irrelevant'. Their two-fold focus will be on being one-flesh and sharing within the Christian community – where everyone was to be subject to each other as an expression of their reverence for Christ – and beyond.[148]

Bingham insists that marriage relationships are much too interesting and satisfying to be disrupted by questions about 'some imagined oppression or need for liberation' from 'irrelevant' liberation movements. He then acknowledges that suppression often occurs where women are treated as inferior while also being over-burdened and pressured. Women who

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[144] Ibid., 31.

[145] Ibid., 33.

[146] Ibid., 38, 39.

[147] Ibid., 49.

[148] Ibid., 50.

run the finances, plan the home, possess the children, set up rules and conditions for family living … are dominant, extroverted, often proud of their accomplishments, and lack natural tenderness. Deeply down they are, for the most part, disappointed and frustrated.

After cautioning about the way male domination and female inferiority can be wrongly rationalised with claims of biblical authority, he returns to his assertion that while domination is unacceptable, rich marriage relationships are 'based on mutual love, and the acceptance of their functional roles'.[149]

Family relationships should therefore be derived from God as Father on the understanding that humanity, made in God's image 'must have a sort of innate "love-structure"'.[150] He re-emphasises that demands for justice and rights are not appropriate as they involve accusations and counter accusations.

Whether people grow into 'good relationships' depends on their positive or negative reactions to life. Personal choices are not imposed and do not result from heredity or environment – even though these factors strongly influence everyone. Bingham summarises his thoughts by declaring that

> Let all negative reactions be seen as the breaking of the law of love, and be named as actual guilts. Let the person repent of these negative reactions, and so be cleared of the guilts.[151]

There is little room for acknowledging any external impact or for anyone recognising they have acted inappropriately:

> What we have really been saying is that we do not have to see life as fatalistic. If we will we can take responsibility for every action of our lives. Whilst others have affected us, yet our wills have allowed this.

Because of 'the Cross', 'grace and love cover the multitude of failures'.[152]

After outlining his views that single people have 'a whole avenue of rich and creative life', he warns about them being 'bitter, twisted, and sour about life' without any evident awareness of the grief they might feel about being single.[153]

Marriage and family life

Chapters 11 to 13 explore marriage relationships and family life from the basis of Bingham's theology of God as Father and of the marriage of Christ and the church.

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[149] Ibid., 52, 53.

[150] Ibid., 57.

[151] Ibid., 62.

[152] Ibid., 67.

[153] Ibid., 68.

Understanding the people of God and Christian homes 'is unintelligible except we first see the nature of God as Father'.[154] Similarly, the marriage of Christ as Bridegroom and the church as his bride informs the people of God in their daily experiences and indicates their ultimate destiny. These two themes are the context in which humanity is to understand authority:

> … this authority is graduated from God the Father through the Son, to man, and through man to his wife, and she to her children. Other lines of authority relate to angels, civil powers, and the leadership structure within the church.

> Within a family there are ordered authorities. As we have said, the husband is head of the wife. Even so it is probably better not to say he is the head of the family, in that Christ, being his head, is the true head of the family. Behind Christ is the Father Who again, is the supreme head of the family. … When it comes to the intimate matter of husband-wife it is there the husband must make his leadership decisions.

> … As the heavenly Father is to His family, so the earthly father must be to his. When we pray for the Father's will to be done on earth as in heaven we recognise the universal principle of a father's authority. The father's word in the home must be law. Even this is presupposing the earthly father to be reflecting the love and discipline of the heavenly Father.[155]

Both parents are to be honoured within this hierarchy, as in Leviticus 19:3 and Deuteronomy 21:18ff, with recognition that while a woman is never a possession, at marriage her primary governing authority is transferred from her father to her husband.

It is in this environment that life and worship, training and education, and vocation are to be explored with a view to reaching maturity. Fathers are to be the primary sources of discipline without being God to their families. Should tragedies strike, parents can learn that redeeming love is a deeper dimension of parenthood (cf. Isaiah 63:16). Suffering can be an occasion 'in which to grow and mature':

> When we stop feeling hurt, guilty, neglected, and turn to share with God in His immediate purposes we will know a genuine peace. Our family problem may not yet be solved but we have begun to share in the fellowship of His sufferings. Something new and deep has happened to us.[156]

Understanding 'roles in the church' is described as a difficult topic because only a biblical presentation can achieve objectivity. Bingham argues that while woman is

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[154] Ibid., 75. Cf. Bingham, *Father! My Father*; *Oh, Father! Our Father*; *I Love the Father [2nd Ed]*.

[155] *Role and Purpose of Man and Woman, The*, 76, 77.

[156] Ibid., 84.

man's 'indispensable partner' and helpmeet, he is 'structured to be the leader' within their marriage relationship, citing Genesis 1:26ff and 2:18ff, 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 and Matthew 19:5–6. He explores women and the patriarchs having claimed that Eve is described as gullible rather than deliberate in sinning with Adam being deliberately sinful.

Nominating that many women mentioned in the Old Testament were 'strong-minded and active' and 'firm helpmeets', Bingham adds that women 'belonged' to men not as chattels but for leadership and protection. He presents several passages which indicate that women were active participants in religious festivals and sanctuary ministry – involvement which he believed was restricted under Rabbinic law by Jesus' lifetime.[157]

Bingham states that women are maturely treated in the New Testament and emphasises that during and after Pentecost they were engaged in prophetic ministry. Citing Galatians 3:26–29, Romans 3:21–31 and 1 Corinthians 12:12, Bingham declared that women are as accepted as men 'so far as salvation is concerned'. Pentecost changed opportunities and not functions – there was now opportunity to 'preach salvation to the world'.[158]

Bingham believes men were leaders in the New Testament just as they were in the Old Testament. He bases his reasoning on the *assumption* that women 'did not figure' as apostles, prophets, evangelists or pastors or teachers – with the possible exceptions of prophet and deacon and recognising the ministry of women to other women (cf. Ephesians 4:11).

He declares that this means Paul 'does not dissolve femininity' and repeats that function is unaltered but opportunity for serving God is changed. Galatians 3:26–29 is further interpreted by reference to 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 which Bingham saw as following the authority pattern of God, Christ, husband, wife. Paul's 'authority-pattern is as old as creation' and will never change.

1 Corinthians 14:35, 1 Timothy 2:11–15 and Titus 2:3–5 reinforce this understanding while 'Acts 18:24–26 shows that man and wife, teamed together can teach another man'. Bingham then again insists that questions about equality are not raised and that while mutual submission applies to everyone in 'the body of Christ', wives must submit to husbands, children to parents and servant to masters – with those in authority loving and caring for those for whom they are leaders. Submission 'is not a mark of inferiority' – as this would link with equality.[159]

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[157] Ibid., 87, 88.

[158] Ibid., 91.

[159] Ibid., 92, 93.

Culture cannot change this or else his assumptions about Christ and the church (and presumably about the Father and God's family) would be *analogies* and not *homologies* and creation would be without any basic structure. Nonetheless,

> there is little that a man can do which a woman cannot do if pressed by necessity … [and] a man can do most of what is a woman's normal work.

Ultimately, Bingham concludes, sexual elements will 'pass away' and the 'so–called masculine "he" will lose its connotation with sex as such'. Everyone will be called 'sons' and so speaking of God as Him 'is part of the whole order'. In the meantime, women are

> are all in 'the testimony of Jesus'. There is no end of their scope of ministry. Within the helper-role is a ministry of wide dimensions. Without woman the man's role cannot be satisfactorily fulfilled.[160]

Bingham concludes by outlining his views on divorce and remarriage. A 'true marriage' is one in which everyone else is forsaken and in which the union of the man and the woman

> is a deep inter-penetration of both, each identifying with the other; each giving himself and herself to the other. Each has the deepest human need met and fulfilled – namely true love.

As he had previously indicated, this union is explored vocationally through procreation and fulfilling God's plan for humanity. His refrain is repeated:

> The marriage succeeds when the husband is the leader-protector-provider, and when the woman is the helpmeet of the man. Both love their children, and care for, and cherish them, training them for their fulfilment of vocation.[161]

Incompatibility 'is a state of mind and attitude rather than an inherent way of being' rather than a reason for failure. Because time does not eradicate all senses of shame and failure, divorce and remarriage are to be avoided in favour of working at finding ways of have a positive view of the current marriage.[162]

Since marriage is 'a total union of two people, joined by God', it is only to be dissolved because of unchastity. Remarriage for any other reason is an act of adultery. He adds that re-marriage

> may not be encouraged or condoned, but it must be faced. Pastoral care and concern must be exercised. … Let us then be realistic, and loving in our realism. Let us take up situation after situation, with people – just where

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[160] Ibid., 93–95.

[161] Ibid., 98.

[162] Ibid., 99, 100.

they are. … Somewhere, in the midst of this love and concern, God will reveal His love and accomplish His will. Somewhere, and somehow, men *(sic)* will know Him as the God of righteousness and the God of mercy and love.[163]

Bingham's verdict is that Christians are to persist in love and not be shaped by worldly patterns and permissiveness about pre-marital sex, homosexuality and abortion. Although persisting may involve suffering, there may be a 'deep purpose within the will and action of God'.

Bingham illustrates his theme by suggesting that the wife of an adulterer should reflect on whether 'she has set up some of the conditions' for it and whether a wife who has grown cold has not been 'loved gently and sensitively' by her husband and made to feel 'inferior and he has not helped her. There are so many facets of relationships which need to be seen, and the right action taken to rectify them'.

It is interesting to note that Bingham mentions him helping her at this point, suggesting that helping might be more mutual than previously implied.[164]

Two appendices are provided. The first discusses curing 'deviations and perversions', including homosexuality. Bingham points out that other activities in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 are commonly described as 'moral lapses'.[165] He rejects physiological and psychological rationalisations for deviations, citing a Festival of Light parliamentary submission and a Sydney Diocesan report as evidence. The second appendix discusses nuclear, extended and community families.

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[163] Ibid., 106.

[164] Ibid., 103, 104.

[165] Ibid., 109ff.

Thomas Smail: *The Forgotten Father* and *Like Father, Like Son: the Trinity Imaged in our Humanity*[166]

Smail's *The Forgotten Father* followed his publication of *Reflected Glory* and preceded *Like Father, Like Son: the Trinity Imaged in our Humanity*. *The Forgotten Father* records something of the way it developed from *Reflected Glory*.[167]

The Forgotten Father contains thoughts on subordination within the Trinity. Smail asks whether obedience is a legitimate term for the eternal Son's relationship with his Father. He affirms a functional subordination while rejecting an ontological one with obedience an eternal characteristic not limited to Jesus' humanity.[168]

Like Father, Like Son commences with a discussion about philosophical and apologetic issues before turning to biblical ones relating to God's image in the Genesis creation narratives. Smail indicates that these accounts concern relationships rather than factual historical accounts of original creational acts. The first story states that men and women together are God's image (representing God) and likeness (resembling God) as this is necessary for fruitfulness and fulness. The second narrative, according to Smail, places a priority on the man ahead of the woman alongside them both being equal image bearers in the previous story.

Smail waits until later in his book to discuss gender imaging further, commenting on his reluctance to write about it and that he probably should have addressed it earlier. He bases his views about gender on his trinitarian narrative that authentic humanity – of both genders – reflects God the Father's initiating love, God the Son's responsive love and God the Spirit's creative love. He then asks concerning the ways men and women are to participate in imaging this divine reality.

After a brief polemic against egalitarianism and feminism, neither of which he defines, Smail contrasts Galatians 3:28 with 1 Corinthians 11:3. His central thesis is re-stated: Differentiated humanity in relationships with each other are only themselves as they reflect 'the divine communion that constitutes the life of the Trinity'.[169]

Smail correlates Genesis 1 with Galatians 3 and Genesis 2 with 1 Corinthians 11 and then states that gender differences concern persons rather than nature. Their distinctiveness is not about qualities but vocation and is realised in inter-dependence. He explains his views using God's response to the first couple's

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[166] Smail, *Forgotten Father, The*; *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity*. See also *Reflected Glory* and *Giving Gift, The*.

[167] *Forgotten Father, The*, 18.

[168] Ibid., 105ff.

[169] Smail, *Like Father, Like Son: The Trinity Imaged in Our Humanity*, 242.

disobedience where he believes that the man's dominance and servility 'surrendered the initiative to his wife'.[170]

Smail uses his canonical hermeneutic to explore two more themes. Men's unique outward-looking vocation correlates with God's external creational activity. Women's unique calling flows out in human relationships which reflect the inner Spirit-uniting life of God – a divine vocation which is ontologically prior to men's calling. Smail claims that there is a 'mutual dependence' resulting from what he calls God's and man's *from-ness.* This, he believes, reveals divine equality and human equality – equality not based on 'sameness'. This view of 'headship', Smail claims, contradicts the 'simple undifferentiated equality' required by 'modern ideological presuppositions'. Smail insists that these beliefs oppose patriarchal oppression:[171]

> The union of the man and the woman in marriage is a reflection in the created order of the Trinitarian union of Father and Son in the divine life. In both cases, the initiator and the responder give themselves to one another in a mysterious unity that binds them inseparably together in a love that at the same time constitutes their unity and maintains and affirms their identities as distinct persons. These two become one flesh, where the two-ness and the oneness are equally essential to the relationship. …

> So in marriage, the man whose calling is to reflect the initiating love of the Father in his work in the world and the woman whose calling is to reflect the responsive and attentive love of the Son in human relationships give themselves, the one to the other.

He concludes that human families reveal the 'initiating, the responsive and the creative modes of love' characteristic of God in fathers, mothers and children as 'three distinct persons'.[172] He later explains that his interpretation includes and benefits from women's vocations in the wider workforce.

Smail qualifies his belief that women are to participate in ministry by saying that it is under a new status deriving from Jesus' attitudes towards women and that women in ministry need prior male authorisation. He sees Paul discussing origination rather than domination in 1 Corinthians 11 and states that Paul was struggling to affirm both male and female interdependence and differentiation.

Understanding God's headship over Christ puts the discussion in the context of the Father's relationship with his Son. It therefore means that relationships between men and women (he does not write husbands and wives) are defined by

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[170] Ibid., 247.

[171] Ibid., 250, 251.

[172] Ibid., 253.

God's and Christ's headship. There is a shift in Smail's emphasis at this point from source to authority – unless authority is to be taken as author-ness.

Smail sees Ephesians 5 reinforcing and confirming these views of headship. Christ's headship over the church is reflected in the 'differentiated union' of a husband and a wife. He explains Paul's statement about mutual submission as being realised because a husband, in giving himself to his wife,

> is to be subject to his wife, and in the way she receives and responds to that love in caring for him, the wife is to be subject to her husband.[173]

He argues that this mutual subordination, giver-receiver love-exchange is a long way from an instruction-obedience narrative. He states that in his own marriage he would not make life-changing decisions without consensus.

Smail concludes his essay on gendered obedience with a note that perichoresis excludes 'forcing actual men and women into stereotypes of authoritative proaction and intuitive relationality'.[174] He nonetheless insists that men are to image the Father's initiating love and women are to image the Son's responsive love – both in the context of the Spirit's creativity.

He wrote he was feeling his way and that he had tried to respect the Bible as God's authoritative word, which he sees as provisional, and that he had attempted on this basis to explore the implications of these texts in our cultural setting – one which is very different to that of the original authors.

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[173] Ibid., 263.

[174] Ibid., 267.

Anthony Petterson, Margaret Mowczko and G. Geoffrey Harper: *The Gender Conversation: Gender, Scripture and creation*[175]

Anthony Petterson

In *Genesis 3 – The Creation of Order, or Frustration of the Creation Order*, Petterson nominates ten reasons to support his view that the Adam was to lead Eve before the fall and that God's punishment negatively affected this hierarchical order rather than established it.[176] He claims that those who disagree with him probably agree that he accurately reflects the texts but have weaker views about biblical authority than his own.

Petterson argues that men and women are equal image bearers *and* that their relationships are ordered with husbands leading and wives assisting. His reasons are as follows

- Adam was created first and hence has leadership.
- The prohibition about eating fruit was only given to Adam.
- Eve was created as a suitable helper to 'resolve a deficiency'.
- Adam not Eve speaks when she is brought to him.
- The LORD speaks to Adam first after they eat the forbidden fruit.
- The pattern of their punishment supports their created order.
- Eve sinned first but the LORD only accuses the serpent and man.
- Adam failed to exercise his responsibility when listening to his wife.
- The LORD spoke about death first to Adam.
- Other punishments are aligned with this created order.

Petterson claims that this second creation account does not demean women or declare women as inferior and that egalitarians are wrong in assigning negative values to patriarchy, hierarchy, subordination and submission. He indicates that the New Testament uses the term headship in relation to this ordering and that men are to exercise authority over women in love.

Petterson seeks to affirm his views about ontological ordering by comparing them with transient settings in human society. He uses this context to resist notions that ordered marriage relationships are abusive or encourage abuse.

He adds that too many people read more than they should into Genesis 1–3 in applying them beyond marriage (even though he has used arguments from social settings to affirm his reasoning). He concludes his essay by noting that disagreements often come from interpreters' aims rather than from obscurity in the texts.

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[175] Murphy and Starling, *Gender Conversation, The*.

[176] Ibid., 15, also 21.

Responses to Petterson's essay

Mowczko indicates that Petterson's reasoning involves inferences not required by the original text. Her comments centre on his claims about who is spoken to and who was created first, pointing out that Jesus challenged assumptions about those who claim authority by being first.

Harper appreciates Petterson's focus on concerns regarding the asymmetry of authority before indicating that both complementarians and egalitarians are guilty of making the text say more than it does. Harper also mentions that women have a greater and more positive profile in the biblical storyline than in other ancient near eastern sources.

Margaret Mowczko

In *Is a Gender Hierarchy Implicit in the Creation Narrative of Genesis 2:4–25?* Mowczko points to recent changes in interpretation of Genesis 3:16 by many scholars which contrast traditional emphases on it as a declaration of a male-dominated gender hierarchy. She rejects it being an endorsement of patriarchy and claims this narrative 'contains profound statements' about equality. In wanting to 'stay with the text', Mowczko indicates that the early chapters of Genesis should be read to understand what the authors intended.[177]

Genesis 1, 2 and 5

Mowczko states that in the first creation account, men and women were both blessed after being created in God's image and likeness and both received the nominated commands. No differences in status, purpose or function are indicated and no mention is made of humans ruling other humans. The complementarian focus on creation rather than the fall to justify their hierarchical views is seen by Mowczko as not adequately appreciating the central equality theme evident in all three creation narratives.[178]

After raising the question of the first person's sex in Genesis 2, Mowczko discusses naming animals, concluding that it was not a pretext for assigning authority to men. God's act of 'surgery on the first human' by which God took a *part* or *side* from the first human (not identified as male before surgery) sets the scene for a discussion about the meaning of Eve as Adam's *helper*.

The word for helper is seen 'as having a vital and strong sense in the Bible', suggesting that the common understanding of the word in relation to Eve is skewed. Mowczko continues in the same theme, arguing that the equivalent word in the New Testament does not 'imply servitude or domesticity'.[179]

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[177] Ibid., 29, 30. Note footnote 19.

[178] Mowczko indicates that Genesis 5:1, 2 is an abbreviated creation narrative.

[179] Murphy and Starling, *Gender Conversation, The*., 35.

Mowczko argues that the word often translated *suitable* in Genesis 2:18 and 2:20 is best seen as meaning *equal and adequate*, as *according to and corresponding with*. The creation of the woman should therefore be understood in terms of companionship rather than assistance, as mutual and not subordinate.

Paul and the created order

Mowczko turns to the chiasmic structure of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 to compare verses 8 and 9 with 11 and 12. She sees a theme of mutual dependency in this pair of verses and that Paul was negating created precedence as an argument for any creational role-based authority hierarchy. She notes that 1 Timothy 2 concerns acceptable and unacceptable teaching behaviours and is not arguing for male-privileged power structures.

No shame

Mowczko wonders whether there was no shame between the first couple because there was no patriarchy – and patriarchy was absent as there had been no fall.

Conclusion

Mowczko concludes that

> Genesis two says nothing whatsoever about the first man having more authority than the first women, let alone having authority *over* the woman.

She reasons that while there is sexual differentiation and statements of 'similarity, affinity, and correspondence between the couple … there is no hint that the woman was subordinate to the man'.[180] She sees these themes reinforced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11.

Responses to Mowczko's essay

Petterson claims that complementarians believe in equality before insisting that ordering exists and involves husbands having leadership responsibilities over their wives. He rejects her suggestion about Adam's gender, reaffirms that helping indicates order and that nakedness is just a precursor to the fall.

Harper affirms Mowczko's focus on the text and equality but asks whether Old Testament usage of *helper* conveys thoughts of becoming secondary for a particular task. He sees her comments on 1 Timothy as unclear, is not persuaded by her thoughts about the first person's gender and thinks that asymmetric authority does not necessarily contradict equality.

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[180] Ibid., 39.

G. Geoffrey Harper

Harper attempts to explore the early Genesis creation narratives using cultic and legal texts from Exodus and Leviticus. He sees the parallels between the creation stories and the instructions for building the tabernacle.

- Exodus 25 to 31 includes seven statements by the LORD with the last one about observing the sabbath.
- Exodus 31:2–5 identifies God's spirit.
- Exodus 27:13–15 states that the tabernacle is to face east.
- Exodus 25:31–36 and 28:33 describe the tabernacle adorned with flora.
- Exodus 25:31–40 refers to a six-branched tree-shaped lampstand in the holy place.
- Exodus 26:31–33 depicts the curtain preventing access to the holy of holies as being embroidered with cherubim images.
- Exodus 39 and 40 uses language which parallels expressions from the first creation account.

Harper then reasons that the filling of the tabernacle with the LORD's glory without anyone present and the central reference in Leviticus about the Day of Atonement segue into a focus on the role of the Aaronic priesthood in fulfilling God's purposes. He argues that these links between cult and cosmos

- are deliberate.
- imply a tabernacle/temple narrative in the first creation account.
- are relevant to gender-related issues in the second creation account.

Harper builds on these connections by comparing the Leviticus 18 prohibitions with the story of the forbidden fruit in Eden. His view is that these links are not cultural idiosyncrasies 'but rather an order that is intrinsic to the pre-fall world'. He also points to intertextual logic that 'suggests that male headship – understood as responsibility to pass on divine commands – is intrinsic to creation order'.[181]

Responses to Harper's essay

Petterson mentions priestly roles. Keeping and guarding the garden links with it being a holy sanctuary. This duty is transferred from Adam to the cherubim and given to the male priesthood, suggesting pastors and husbands have creational specific roles in teaching and leading not assigned to women.

Mowczko wants care taken reading back from tabernacle narratives into creation stories as the author Hebrews emphasises that the tabernacle infrastructure was provisional of a new temple reality (cf. Hebrews 10:1ff). Jesus, as High Priest, she reminds readers, gives access to men and women. Mowczko then mentions numerous women passing on divine commands.

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[181] Ibid., 54.

Responses to these snapshots

Larry Christenson

Christenson's beliefs about God's order for wives results in placing pressure on wives to take responsibility where they are told they need care and protection. His views seem to lead to marriages being a potential conflict zone where every issue is decided under a male-dominated authority-obedience regime. Sadly, this approach can easily degenerate into the opposite type of behaviour from that to which Christenson hopes husbands adopt.

His views regarding God's order for children raise many questions, including whether there are other perspectives for considering child-parent relationships. Issues relating to legitimate disobedience and genuine inquisitiveness are two examples where other factors could be vital. Seeing children only in terms of authority-obedience raises questions about whether Jesus' lordship is also only an authority-obedience issue, and one where disobedience is punished (even by violence) and obedience is rewarded.

A major concern in his approach to parenting is his insistence on the use of physical violence, and what this pattern of parenting teaches adults and children about how other conflicts are to be resolved. If violence is an acceptable way of deciding violations to parental authority, then this method of conflict resolution can too easily extend to husband-wife relationships, and indeed any hierarchical relationships in the broader community. Promoting physical violence is also likely to encourage other forms of bullying and abuse, including between siblings, as well as in schools and at sporting activities.

If forgiveness only comes after punishment, what does it mean? Do the Scriptures teach that God only forgives sinners after God has already punished them? What theology of atonement is implied by this approach?

In discussing a wife's calling to be a helper, Christenson does not appear to comment on what it means for the husband to help her. Perhaps Genesis 2 has an implied story about helping, where Adam looks for the opportunity to be able to help a partner who will help him in a similar manner to the helping which he has in mind to give to his companion. Perhaps Genesis 2 wants to explain that true companionship includes mutual help, and that parenting is a shared calling requiring collaboration and consensus rather than exclusive authority and excluded subordination.

In Ephesians 5, Paul may be countering what he sees as failures in the patriarchy around him. Paul's focus in this passage is on husbands being more Christlike, rather than on wives living in subjection, and may not be on the promotion of patriarchal male headship. Paul affirms mutual subjection as a basis for marriage, family and work relationships before commenting on them, a point which seems

lost on Christenson. While mutual submission may not fully explain the dynamics of husband-wife, parent-children and employer-employee relationships, it is the realm in Ephesians 5 in which Paul want these relationships to be understood. Hence, the extent to which Christenson expresses these relationships as male-only and unilateral does not correlate well with Paul's inter-relational thinking.

Similarly, Colossians 3:18 and 19 are best understood in the context of the harmony which results from being clothed with the love that is outlined in verses 12 to 17. This love-clothing includes 'compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience', qualities that are embedded in Paul's exhortation to mutual submission in Ephesians 5:21. The self-sacrificing love to which Christenson rightly directs husbands includes prioritising their wife's needs, as Paul exhorts everyone to do in Philippians 2:1–11, especially verse 3.[182] Colossians 3:18 NRSV can be understood as meaning: 'Wives, be subject [in love] to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives [by being subject to them] and never treat them harshly'.

There are warning signals that something is missing in Christenson's approach when relationships are seen only in terms of his unilateral divinely ordered authority and submission construct, even when husbands are supposed to be loving and giving. If husbands are to pattern their headship on Christ's lordship over the church, are they to say to their wives that

> All authority in heaven and earth is given to me [by creation, confirmed by the fall and validated by the gospel], go therefore and bring up the family, baptising the children into this patriarchal culture in which I will be over you as ruler until our lives have ended (cf. Matthew 28:16–20)?

The tragedy of single-sided, one-dimensional authority-obedience relationship constructs is not only evident in failed and stressed marriages, but in struggling church contexts. Patriarchal domination of subordinated wives, laity, workers, helpers and children reinforces rather than resolves the consequences outlined in Genesis 3:14–18. A gospel is needed which unravels this behaviour, not a message that exacerbates and intensifies the problems already faced by superordinates and subordinates.

If leadership in marriage or elsewhere assumes subordinates are not equipped for leadership (as Christenson states about wives), then marriages and communities have very limited leadership capacity. This approach enables leaders to deal with conflicts by inadequate and covert practices, only to find that the problems they face worsen rather than resolve, and that struggling relationships fracture further rather than heal and become more wholesome.

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[182] This passage applies to all who find encouragement in Christ, comfort in love and participation in the Spirit that Paul mentions in verse 1 (ESV), and not just women (cf. Ibid., 33).

The difficulties inherent in Christenson's approach are not resolved by people being told to try harder and love better. The issues involved require an improved awareness of love, relationships, participation and community.

In summary, my concerns arising from Christenson's approach include:

•   Generalised statements about gender roles. Readers are told what roles women and men, as racial entities, are equipped for or not equipped for. The implication is that the least equipped male is more able to fulfil leadership roles than the best equipped female. Christenson ignores the idea that there is natural, God-given diversity within males and females as well as between them, and that an overlap of roles and responsibilities can be shared mutually between them.

•   Generalised statements about what is appropriate in modern culture are made as if the New Testament authors were writing exactly for today's ever-changing culture. The social and historical context of any biblical passage is especially relevant when social and cultural conclusions are being explored. The absolute nature of Christenson's comments suggests he expects application of his judgements to occur in all cultural settings and for every generation.

•   Underpinning Christenson's confidence is a view of Scripture that may too readily import into biblical statements information that distorts and subverts the original meaning of the selected passages. This difficulty about cultural and historical context is seen when biblical terms like headship and submission are given meanings which passages under consideration may not address, and when passages have other contexts which are not mentioned.

Christenson's thoughts are worth mentioning if only to clarify differences between subordinationist and egalitarian views. In addition to difficulties with generalisation, culture and Scripture, his one-dimensional authority-submission hierarchy focuses on the 'me-you' relationships in which we all find ourselves. Those committed to subordinationism emphasise 'only me and not you', while egalitarians look for opportunities where, depending on roles and contexts, each person can facilitate 'me including you', 'me and you together' and 'me with you'. This shared journey is the unity of purpose which Paul wrote about in Philippians 2:1–11, and at least infers in Colossian 3:1 to 4:6, Ephesians 5:1 to 6:9 and 1 Corinthians 11 to 14.

Christenson's thoughts are helpful when 'complementarians' argue that certain 'soft-patriarchal' views are those that are most long-standing in the church. It is worth asking whether Christenson' views are closer to traditional teaching than seemingly more benevolent modern patriarchal dogma!

Geoffrey Bingham

Overview

The Role and Purpose of Man and Woman provides some insights into Bingham's thinking during the early years of NCPI. It suggests an intra-play and an interplay between at least three binaries: culture and theology, role and purpose, and men and women. The cultural aspects in his book are transparent especially as he outlines his 'nitty-gritty' views on a range of issues including women's roles in the home in the main text and references to homosexuality in an appendix. He uses words like objective several times to suggest that the Bible provides some form of definitive agency while acknowledging that cultural factors impact our understanding.

I believe that the significance of intra- and inter-generational processes in sustaining and enabling human society is broader than any one narrative. There is a mutual dependency in each case regardless of the extent to which authority-focused and authoritarian practises exist. As people age, they look to those who previously depended on them for care and as marriage partners' lives progress each person is likely to need their partner in different ways. Parenting and marriage are ubiquitous in all societies and involve a wide range of expressions and cultures. Bingham's agricultural interests and his creational emphasis also point to connections with the environment from which we come and to which we return – connections which are absent from this book. His thoughts are one part of a large tapestry – one of ideas that create tensions and conflicts while also allowing exploration and investigation to occur.

Just as the Bible provides insights into the lives and thoughts of numerous generations, so our interactions with it are framed by our own contexts. While Bingham focuses on his understanding of hierarchy and authority, his sense of concern and compassion is evident in his repeated mentions of love and delight in marriages, families and communities. He sees fruitful living as an anticipation of an eschatological reality from which we are not to be unnecessarily distracted by angry dissent, disagreement and distress. The 'Cross' provides an eternal source of forgiveness by God in Jesus Christ effected in history for those who change their minds – repent – of their failures. This cross acts as a Spirit-fountain of hope for future reconciliation for humanity and with creation.

Readers of *The Role and Purpose of Man and Woman* may easily miss Bingham's pastoral concerns for people's welfare either because they want to insist and enforce his views as some ministers aligned with him seemed to do or because they find them absurd and repressive and so fail to explore his helpful insights.

Head-leader and helpmeet-follower

Bingham argues that this is a 'love-structure' and that without it disfunction will lead to various forms of conflict and strife. He bases his views on 1 Corinthians

11:3 and uses it to interpret the second Genesis narrative and passages such as Galatians 3:25–29. However, neither leadership or headship are stated in the second creation narrative with domination and desire emerging after the couple have eaten forbidden fruit. Bingham's description of Eve as gullible and Adam as intentional generates an inaccurate and demeaning gender profile. Examples on gullibility and intention in the Hebrew Bible are not based on gender.

Ideas of subordination are contradicted by the reference to Adam being created from dust before Eve is formed from his rib. There is a thematic movement neither to increased inferiority or to subordination but to delight, accomplishment and fruitfulness. Eve in this sense *heads* the whole creation process and *leads* the procreational activity necessary for humanity's survival and prosperity. Adam is *servant* in this activity whatever is made of whether he acts as initiator.

The first creation account does not subordinate *forming* in the first three days to *fulness* of the next three days or vice-versa but establishes a mutual and cyclic program of abundance. Ideas of a *single* and *final* creation of fixed types of plants and animals are absent or minimal against a long-term canvas of growth, increased number and diversity, and seventh-day refreshment and rest.

The relationship between birthing spirit and spoken word in this first narrative can be easily missed. The feminine word breath precedes the announcement. The word has a mutual 'let us' character that relates to the moving, birthing spirit and the spirit converts chaos and emptiness into form and fulness in a dynamic and harmonious divine process with the spoken word.

The second creation narrative identifies the theme of the LORD's presence with the LORD's utterances – a mutual reality evident in passages in the Pentateuch and beyond which focus on God as LORD.

I see Bingham's love-structure and its notions of authority and helping as needing reframing and re-expressing to recognise *form* and *fullness* as terms that apply to both men and women, and that the image of God as male and female is diminished and distorted unless a mutual love-structure is recognised.

Birthing is an authoring act to which men submit and in which they are hopefully helpful. Notions that align helping with subordination distort the references to *God as helper.* My father repeatedly taught us that he was not so much committed to a *work ethic* when using his significant energies, resources and gifts but to a biblical *help* ethic, set within his own patriarchal views.[183]

Paul's injunctions about mutual submission and interdependence in marriage, parenting and work-environment contexts suggests the apostle was aware of these timeless truths and prioritised them over patriarchal power and privilege.

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[183] 1 Samuel 7:12 was often quoted: 'Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah, and named it Ebenezer; for he said, "Thus far the LORD has helped us"'. Also, Hebrews 4:16.

Creational precedence, as in Ephesians 5:21 and 1 Corinthians 11:11, is therefore not primarily about headship as in authority over but about service, sacrifice and selflessness for the welfare of other people.

Prioritising wives, children and servants-slaves – along with widows, orphans and outsiders – in a life of community love and mutual giving is about caring for the disenfranchised so they can fully participate in marriages, families and communities free from the restraints and restrictions of the exclusions and perversions that are described after the first couple's poor choices (Genesis 3:14–19; cf. Philippians 2:1ff).

Mentions in Paul's letters about silencing women are not therefore about marginalising or excluding them by using male-dominated, patronising and demeaning behaviours. Silencing was not about vulnerability or gullibility, but about excluding certain forms of *inappropriate expression* so that women's true and authentic participation in their families and communities could flourish.

Galatians 3:25–29 is not just about salvation or *entering* Christ but about a full and mutual *participation* in Christ according to the gifts God gives by creation and redemption.

Reactions and responses

Bingham declared:

> Let all negative reactions be seen as the breaking of the law of love, and be named as actual guilts. Let the person repent of these negative reactions, and so be cleared of the guilts.[184]

His rationalisation cited Victor Frankl's Logotherapy. Frankl's *Search for Meaning* includes a significant section on the problem of reductionism.[185] Bingham used will-power as opposed to won't power in the context of loving and caring environments. But what happens when the 'father's word is law' and is not just errant but abusive? What happens when the marriage relationship and home environment are toxic? Are innocent partners to engage in self-blame and self-shame as Bingham implies?

What about spiritual abuse where the one to whom Bingham assigns not only absolute and total authority, but an authority divinely endorsed and assigned, self-deifies and acts as God-in-residence – in the home as husband or father and in the church where lay-people, women, children and servants-slaves are to be seen but not heard? What about the 'slippery-slope' – to use jargon referenced against egalitarianism and where that was supposed to lead – into violence – along with physical, psychological and spiritual abuse?

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[184] Bingham, *Role and Purpose of Man and Woman, The*, 62.

[185] Frankl, *Will to Meaning, The*, 15–30.

I see no biblical mandate for these views of exclusive male-privileged authority. Anyone impacted by tyrannical despotic behaviour needs support for their valid reactions and responses rather than further acrimony that encourages dis-spiriting self-criticisms. Where transparency, truth and trust are broken and where actions, evidence and explanations are subverted, vulnerable parties are being manipulated and exploited. Ongoing suffering in the hope of a change of attitude is rarely if ever a safe recommendation for affected parties in marriages, families or Christian (and other) communities.

Bingham's declaration might be well meant, but in the hands of harsh leaders it can be used to silence, suppress and subvert criticism and to create toxic environments which are likely to lead to destructive consequences.

Any form of social or spiritual hierarchical accountability is cancelled by this process since full responsibility can be expected to fall on those impacted by any form of abuse and none on those who act inappropriately. Tragically, the only party to whom the abused can appeal is the abuser who can then simply increase the intensity of their abuse.

The 'Cross' then becomes an abuser's *best* weapon by demanding grace from an abused person to cover up their own evil in a perversion of 1 Corinthians 13. This form of grace kisses goodness and righteousness goodbye in a distortion of Psalm 85 and many other passages.

Bingham's analysis sadly leaves no mechanism for dispute resolution apart from in an abuser's hands – or with those aligned to the abuser. The Anglican categories of leadership include rector, priest and curate. They are expected to rule, to enable and encourage access to the church community and to describe context through their pastoral oversight, generosity and wisdom. These alignments raise issues of votes, voices and views – all of which are excluded from those under Bingham's version of authority and function.

A family's or a community's environment is vulnerable if those Bingham calls leaders and heads with their totalitarian authority become driven by greed, power, success, glory or fame. Their supposedly ontologically subordinated and allegedly gullible partners and dependents will then be adversely impacted and hindered from appropriately pursuing their own legitimate vocations. Their well-being is more than an issue of reactions and responses. It is one of external realities of being dominated and possibly abused, realities which they may have experienced or may be experiencing, realities which can rarely be lightly dismissed or silently endured.

Opportunities and being

> We can see that mere demands for 'justice' or 'my rights' is wide of the mark of love. … Justice of this sort never achieves anything, but love dissolves every hurt and brings total renewal.

> That man and woman are different is obvious. This is not so to those whose minds are gripped by the desire for equality, or rather the desire to show that men and women are equal – whatever. We have observed that it is neither a question of equality or inequality, but of personal being. It is one thing to be male, and another to be female. It is one thing to relate totally as male and female, and another to be in competition as male and female. To be in competition is to strive for supremacy or even equality, when in fact this question does not properly arise.

> What change, then, took place at Pentecost? The answer must be, 'There was no change of function, but a change of *opportunity*.' Israel, as such, had not been committed to preach salvation to the world. Now those of the Israel of God must proclaim the Gospel, universally. Women, no less than men, must be in the operation of this proclamation.[186]

Bingham's dismissal of equality, rights and justice is aligned with his insistence on what he considers functional and creational roles based on definitive archetypes. He locks these roles in homologous not analogous frameworks with cultural patterns to be decreed and determined by those with authority.[187] If those with power are loving and kind, then all will be well!

But what if the ways a person's *being* is expressed *vocationally* in *opportunities* in marriages, families and communities is *structured* by mutual respect, submission, partnership? And what if that comes from the together-mindedness sung about in Philippians 2:1ff 'which is in Christ Jesus' and for which Jesus suffered, died and was raised and exalted?

And what if roles are part of the provisional and changeable realities of life that modify and adjust as we grow, mature and age? And what if these roles are living and life-enhancing expressions 'according to the gifts' we receive (Romans 12:1–25 and Ephesians 4:1–16)? And what if justice, rights and equality are practices and processes that ensure inclusion, enable diversity and enhance *everyone's* dignity regardless of gender, religious status or ethnicity – and align with God's own righteousness, justice, goodness and truth?

Perhaps Paul had that in mind in writing Galatians! Justice, rights and equality are not then about competition or striving but about collaborating and serving. Pentecostal opportunities are *cruciformed* and *Christocentric* – they release everyone into a symphonic harmony of life – of the life sung about in the creational poems in Genesis, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah and elsewhere.

For me, accessing the better parts of Bingham's theology involved reframing his male-privileged language, his hierarchical trinitarian thinking and his male

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[186] Bingham, *Role and Purpose of Man and Woman, The*, 58, 49, 91.

[187] Ibid., 93.

privileged marriage, family and ecclesiastical structures and finding discourses that encouraged mutuality, reciprocity and gifting-oriented approaches – ones based on love and participation and not on decrees and domination.

Family and marriage

Bingham's archetypal patterning of marriage on Christ and the church and of family on God as Father using passages such as 1 Corinthians 11 warrants careful inspection. If the image of God is male and female then the use of masculine words for God has limitations. Likewise, Christ being husband and the church his bride has similar constraints especially where the family of God is called sons of God.

Simply put, just as human masculinity and femininity should not be projected back onto God, so descriptions of male and female roles from divine qualities is bound to fail. God is known and unknown. Humanity is not God and knows God as Paul speaks of seeing love in 1 Corinthians 13.

The same problems occur when considering relationships. God's triune being and human families are not direct copies. Human marriages produce families whereas the triune God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, relates to humanity using the language of both family and marriage.

Thomas Smail

Smail's appreciation for some of the complexities in exploring his theme of gendered imaging of God is evident, as is his awareness that his steps forward are somewhat tentative. He has, perhaps admirably, sought to set male and female relationships in homes, churches and the wider community in a Christological and trinitarian context. He has also sought to follow what he nominated as canonical interpretation.

Several questions arise from his interpretation. Central to these questions are the ways fundamental differences between God as both one and triune and humanity as one and as male and female impact Smail's approach. I mention some aspects that I see as worth further consideration:

- Divine trinitarian one-ness and marriage one-flesh unity are not the same. There is a separation and distinctiveness about marriage partners which is not present in God.

- God is nearly always described using male terminology in the Bible and therefore human masculinity and femininity have no direct parallels within God. There are significant implications in defining male-female relationships downstream from God's Father-Son relationship, not the least being its impact on parent-child relationships.

- Assigning divine initiative, response and creativity as attributes primarily if not completely of one divine person may involve misleading trinitarian understandings about the three-persons-one-God divine nature.

- The fruitfulness narratives in the Genesis creation stories both involve mutuality: men and women image and correlate with God in the first account and they commune with the LORD together as co-helper, co-helped partners in the second one. Whatever precedence Adam's prior creation indicated is redefined by Eve's precedence as the mother of all living (Genesis 3:20; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:11, 12).

- God's external relationship with humanity is defined using marriage metaphors in 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesian 5, yet a husband-wife relationship is internal in a family to which parenting children is external. Categorising divine internal and external relationships to forms of human identity and relationships may be misleading of the full reach of humanity as God's image.

- Gendered imaging descriptions are burdened with reductionist tendencies as they contain generalised narratives that are seen as always applying regardless of context. Are, for example, men who are more inclined to respond than to initiate effeminate, and vice-versa? Are some or many women more able to initiate than many men?

It seems to me, in recognising that men and women are not the same, that God's image imprinted on humanity is more complex and varied than Smail has indicated. God's triune being *ad intra* and *ad extra* (as far as those terms are useful) is imprinted uniquely and personally on and in each of us as well as in our marriage, family and community relationships – to the extent that these occur within our transient everyday lives. There is a mystery to human being and sociality which reflects the divine mystery of which we sometimes see a little (cf. 1 Corinthians 13; 2 Corinthians 2).

Anthony Petterson, Margaret Mowczko and G. Geoffrey Harper

Petterson

The headline Petterson uses identifies some of his hermeneutical assumptions. His phrase 'the man (Adam) was given' suggests a view of Scripture and of God.[188] There are many biblical passages which are not understood in the same authoritative way as Petterson's statement regarding Adam.

Petterson criticises those who 'do not share evangelical convictions about the authority of this part of God's word, [and who] dismiss or question its relevance

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[188] Murphy and Starling, *Gender Conversation, The.*, 15.

for today'.[189] This rhetorical flourish is emotively loaded, and his polemical approach reinforces opinions that the doctrine of male leadership is about a privilege partly maintained by maligning those who disagree with it.

Petterson's ten aspects all use inductive inferences from the text, inferences that align with the patriarchal interpretation he wants to establish. This alignment is worth testing by outlining alternatives that see priority, position and power as servant ministries rather than leadership claims and which recognise that the text is written using male-includes-female language.

It is worth examining the bookends of his article. After listing these ten aspects, he criticises those who see Genesis as 'demeaning to women'.[190] Perhaps one reason for the gender confusion he identifies might not be the breakdown of a good patriarchal system, but its failure, a failure evident with all the patriarchs, in Hebrew and Jewish society and in other ancient nations.

Petterson links male rule and female 'willing assistance' with New Testament headship texts.[191] He uses provisional, non-ontological, cultural examples to claim order does not necessarily demean while insisting that male-led marriages are ontological and not provisional. If women are not inferior or less valuable, why must they be marginalised and excluded from roles identified in the first creation account and not explicitly excluded in the second one?

Petterson states that the 'real solution … is found in Christ'. Yet he finds 'in Christ' involves roles and functions which exclude women. Perhaps mutual submission *is* an essential social reality about which Paul writes in Philippians 2:1ff and Ephesians 5:1ff. Perhaps it is that mutuality which is evident in the creation of Eve as the culminating act of glorious divine creativity for which Adam is innately and essentially pre-created as *her* helper companion – *her* willing assistant in *his* journey with *her* and *hers* with *him*.

Perhaps the Genesis writers wanted to encourage women to share the helper status indicated by God's presence in Eden. Perhaps they wanted to explain that mutual help includes sinless Adam helping sacred Eve.[192] Perhaps the last created being was not to be subordinated and marginalised under ontological male domination but was to be inseparably *one in everything that he was and in everything he did*. She was, after all, as he exclaims, 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'. She was 'Woman, for out of Man this one was taken' for a communion of mutual assistance and leadership (Genesis 2:23–24).

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[189] Ibid., 15, 16.

[190] Ibid. 21.

[191] Ibid. 21, 22.

[192] The second creation narrative states that Eve was created in Eden (Genesis 2:15ff).

There can be no shame in their ontological participation as they engage in all aspects of their shared leadership. Petterson's ideas about provisional and cultural subordination and hierarchy are relevant insofar as they highlight that *this* kind of subordination is derived from provisional and functional gifting and not from gender constructs which exclude women from roles that are part of their essential creational purpose and identity (cf. Genesis 1:26ff).

While Petterson's appeal for husbands to be loving, caring and protective is commendable, he sadly bypasses how wonderfully God has gifted wives to be loving, caring and protective of their husbands. He minimises the mutual authority of the two companions in Genesis, an authority expressed in the context of mutual helping, and so misses the inevitable consequence of his logic: the bolstering of an alleged male status and the resultant potential for the abuse of the subordinated party.

Indicating that a husband is to lead his wives for 'her good and in her interests' does not dissolve the impact of a unilateral power and privilege construct.[193] They are not equal in potential, position or patronage under his structure since equality excludes functional discrimination and marginalisation.

Mowczko's greatest concern about Petterson's interpretation of the creation sequence highlights the need to consider ways in which comments on texts by people from their own contexts need to be considered in our own situations.[194]

By leaving us with a thought about humility and service as being essential to true leadership, Mowczko points us to ways in which Genesis 2 can be seen to embrace women as leaders in marriage and wider society, rather than being read as marginalising and excluding them from leadership.

Harper helpfully mentions ancient near-eastern contexts and indicates how 'highly subversive' Genesis 2 is 'in its original context'.[195] Perhaps Genesis 2 needs to be seen today as subversive in fresh ways. Perhaps it needs to be seen as moving us towards a society where men and women, and wives and husbands are co-workers in the presence of God to achieve the purposes of God without this pre-determined asymmetric authority. Perhaps the text can encourage us to consider ontological equality and mutuality in leadership, and permit provisional, hierarchical gift-determined expressions independent of pre-determined gender constructs. Perhaps the voices of those marginalised by asymmetric authority structures can be heard without those with privilege, power and position and who

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[193] Murphy and Starling, *Gender Conversation, The.*, 41.

[194] Ibid., 26.

[195] Ibid., 28.

claim to have noble intentions concluding that those subordinated are speaking pejoratively and acting subversively with inappropriate motives.[196]

Harper's last comment that asymmetric authority *and* equality are both parts of the 'God-ordained fabric of Israelite life' enlarges on his response to Petterson's paper. Questions remain as to whether the patriarchal social context in which Scripture was written is an anthropological and cultural reality that interpreters must consider, and which God wants to deconstruct, or whether it is ontologically present in the creation and intended for human well-being. The process by which this debate is settled involves an examination of the biblical meta-narrative and includes recognition of the cultural and theological biases of the scholars involved.[197]

Harper's second point is about 1 Timothy 2 and whether Paul was correcting a 'twisted form of the creation account'. Paul's comments may be informed by local knowledge not leading to interpretations that either see Paul as 'sexist' or appealing to a hierarchical created order.[198]

Mowczko[199]

Mowczko's article is a helpful reminder of the key passages involved in the complementarian-subordinationist vs. mutualist-egalitarian debate. The nature of gender equality and functional interdependence raises many questions. Perhaps they should suggest much care is needed not to unilaterally engage in cultural discrimination against a disadvantaged and marginalised gender.

Mowczko sees equality and helping rather than subordination and helping as a significant shift. An ontologically subordinated companion is not a companion *in all things*: that was the problem conveyed by the narrative about creating animals. A side-by-side helper shares everything with differentiations between them in gifting and life-experience rather than hierarchy. It seems that the ladder of inference is well climbed when biological differences are escalated into a widely generalised hierarchy.[200] Complementarity can be considered without underlying subordinationist constructs, so enabling a rich mutuality both within and between genders.

Mowczko's article is helpful regarding key passages used by subordinationists. Her comments on 1 Corinthians 11 are an apt reminder of the dangers of selective

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[196] Ibid., 21.

[197] Cf. Priest, *Learning to Love Wisdom*.

[198] Murphy and Starling, *Gender Conversation, The.*, 44.

[199] Also, Mowczko, 'Marg Mowczko: Exploring the Biblical Theology of Christian Egalitarianism'. has a wide range of valuable well-researched resources that outline the insights highlighted and touched on in her paper – and many more.

[200] Murphy and Starling, *Gender Conversation, The.*, 36.

reading. Her paragraph on 1 Timothy 2 identifies another significant text. Paul may also be commenting on the way conversations occurred in his lifetime when the Christian community assembled, with men and elder sons possible separated from their wives and other children.

The last issue Mowczko raises is about honour-shame. Her suggestion that 'Perhaps there was no shame because there was no patriarchy' should not be lightly dismissed. If the underlying social fabric is one of honour-shame, then could it be that in all relationships, including between men and women, honour and shame form a hierarchy. In a patriarchal context, this emerges systemically as Mowczko indicates. The question can be asked, though, as to whether God has a richer reality for humanity in mind than one which permanently subordinates people based on gender, race, class or social construct. Hence Mowczko's apt conclusion that 'mutual reciprocal service and assistance, as well as our shared origin, makes for true complementarity'.[201]

Petterson and Harper's responses align with their theses.

Harper

Harper's reasoning from Exodus and Leviticus outlines helpful text resources and insights relating to the interplay of tabernacle and temple themes in the creation narratives and creation theologies in the accounts of tabernacle and temple construction. Petterson's additional comment about male priesthood and early church leadership also emerge in debates about the creation accounts and contemporary church structures.

Mowczko's helpful response reminds readers that the tabernacle and temple are interpreted in the New Testament as being transitory with the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and session of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and the Church being identified with a new tabernacle-temple. Just as baptism of men and women replaces circumcision of men, so male-privileged leadership is seen as giving way in practice and teaching to a new world with a new community where all are one in Christ Jesus (cf. Galatians 3:19–4:19).[202]

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[201] Ibid., 40.

[202] Cf. Don Priest, *Travelling Together* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022), *Nations and Covenant*, 83ff. Also, *In Triune Community*, *God's presence in the gift of tabernacle and temple worship*, 101ff.

Perspectives and applications

These perspectives and applications profile aspects of my journey in hierarchical male-dominated conservative evangelical and Anglo-Catholic contexts and my disconnections from them. They were written at different times in a variety of settings with their themes exploring what I saw and see as core issues.

Encountering evangelicalism: a confession

Patriarchy and power

I encountered two forms of Anglican evangelicalism in the early 1970s, one mainly focused on individual and community piety and another with primary concerns about ecclesiastical organisation and power. I interacted later with an Anglo-Catholic context with power dominated priorities. In each of these communities, profiles relating to marriage were prominent. While it was not difficult to recognise their agenda, their focus was clearly limited to one form of marriage, one that privileged men ahead of women. The same journey was evident in the aspects of the Jesus and Charismatic movements with which I had contact in the 1970s. What were the biblical and theological foundations for these opinions? What social agendas affected the life and mission of these churches?[203]

It was evident to me that certain boundary conditions were significant, and that strong links existed between good evangelical theology, with its self-declared 'high' view of scripture, and its views on marriage and ministry. 'Other' inferior Christians, we were told, had liberal theologies, egalitarian views of marriage, and ordained women into ministry. These alternative views were presented as a slippery slope: the consequences of a slippery slope in the other direction, such as marginalising and excluding women and silencing domestic violence, were rarely, if ever, discussed.

I wanted to be in communities that were theologically sound, well-taught *and* inclusive *and* which had locally initiated leadership. I consequently did not pursue opportunities to study theology at conservative theological colleges. In engaging with a local pseudo-Anglican, inter-denominational group, I was attracted by a theological emphasis which appeared rich in atonement, incarnational and trinitarian theology, and whose leader was grounded in pastoral concerns and practice. As time passed, conservative pressures increasingly surfaced similar priorities to those already outlined. Wanting to be constructive and optimistic, I

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[203] Adelaide University Evangelical Union was at the time student led with guidance from a travelling staffworker and without any residential staffworker. It had a committee structure of male president, male and female vice-presidents, secretary, prayer secretary and missionary secretary. The prayer emphasis was on ecclesiastical submission and the missionary emphasis on recruitment to full-time, evangelical causes, rather than on participating in broader vocational life in local communities.

accommodated myself to what I observed, and hoped that their leaders would improve the directions taken by the group.

By the early 2000s, it was clear that equating good theology with 'high' views of Scripture, patriarchal marriages, and male-only eldership and ordained ministry, were the *primary* and even the *sole* goals of self-titled *godly* evangelicals, and that these priorities were to be insisted on and implemented as significant boundary conditions against what was perceived to be inferior biblical teaching. These approaches to Christian life also dominated the two Baptist churches in which I was involved after 1990, with their different approaches to piety and power, and despite their largely unrelated theological connections.

Dissention and departure

My efforts to interpret what I was hearing and to accommodate myself to this alien culture by pro-active involvement in music and information technologies, lay teaching and leadership, and connecting with people were unsuccessful.

The tipping point for me was pastoral practice. I had wrongly assumed that common decency and dignity would include concern for those marginalised and discriminated by gender roles. I saw repeated evidence of clerical power, ecclesiastical profile and patriarchal position determining the way people were allegedly 'cared' for and observed unhelpful and unwelcome outcomes. I reviewed my own understandings, changed some of my behaviours, reconsidered my lay involvement and attempted to find others who shared my views and who would participate with me in my journey. I regret my tardiness and my inadequacies in handling these issues and apologise to anyone who was adversely affected by my levels of loyalty and generosity to these contexts.

It was evident to me in my educational leadership and teaching that creative and innovative learning and research thrive best when learners know well defined and respected inclusive relational boundaries. Learners were most positive and successful when clearly negotiated expectations aligned with gift-oriented goals were established and maintained by those facilitating and leading their activities. With these priorities in place, learners were more confident and able to take sensible initiatives, make wise comments, ask relevant questions, and query what concerned and motivated them.

My educational and church-related experiences have taught me that highly hierarchical organisations and contexts rarely thrive as learning communities. Leaders of this type of group usually act as opinion-generators and take initiatives in ways that demand people implement them without significant comment, criticism or complaint. These outcomes can lead to a lack of respect by leaders for the personal boundaries of those involved, accompanied by a strong sense of entitlement and a failure to meet the realistic and often suppressed expectations of those they dominate.

Christian communities are often groups where volunteers actively help manage facilities and support leaders. These groups seem to me too often to be at risk of generating core rigidities and role locks where echo-chamber feedback and group-think limits growth and avoids meaningful reflection and reviews.

Two questions rarely if ever seem to be asked by leadership groups when issues about a minister's behaviours are raised. The first one concerns the level of silence about the value of, need for and implementation of professional standards concerning the ways ministers behave towards laypeople. It would seem to me that good practice includes prompt reflexes that promote and enforce these professional standards. The second question also relates to the welfare of laypeople. The consistent message communicated to me has been that laypeople basically exist for the benefit of ordained and licenced ministers and that any notion that ministers, priests and pastors are working in any primary sense to serve laypeople is mistaken. Churches, in my experience, have usually proved to be *clergy-centric* rather than *client-centric*, so operating with priorities that easily disempower and discourage those who voluntarily attend.

I have belonged to too many groups that have experienced decline, and, in some cases closed, and I remain concerned about the leadership approaches I encountered concerning the way women and laypeople were not treated with respect or honour. I believe that leadership behaviours which denigrate, dismiss and deny expressions of concern by laypeople, especially women, align poorly with biblical insights or wise thinking. I lack confidence that the self-promoted 'gospel' intent of these leaders achieves much success or significantly enriches society.[204] Nonetheless, I have hope since divine truth and life comes freshly every day, regardless of our status, race or gender, and I believe it enriches any aspect of any family or community group where mutual love and care are prioritised over law and coercion.

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[204] Cf. Kevin N. Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Cascade Books, 2017), Hunter III, *Celtic Way of Evangelism, The: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again*, Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, Ellul, *Politics of God and the Politics of Man, The*, René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001), Jenkins, *Lost History of Christianity, The*.

Ancient narratives and contemporary relationships

I have included edited notes and comments of two seasonal school sessions I led for New Creation Publications Inc. (NCPI) relevant to this theme.[205] The first session was a seminar presented much earlier than the second plenary session. I have included them not because I would now present them in the same way or with the same content. Part of their value may be in indicating some of my thinking within NCPI at the time.

I aimed to avoid subordination narratives although these were significant in Geoffrey Bingham's theology, writing and leadership. I raised issues about preferencing masculinity in the seminar. I presented some eschatological themes about mutual human relationships somewhat aware of the way biblical cultures permeated *the author's* symbolism and rhetoric. I wanted to leave space for listeners to interpret these themes in *their* current diverse circumstances.

I have included several footnotes that are intended to give some insights to a few of my reflections on re-reading and editing these notes.

Sexuality yesterday and today

Fundamental to an adequate discussion of this theme is a clear understanding of femininity, masculinity and marriage. We need sensitivity towards those who we might think have perceptions that we believe are unbiblical or biblically inadequate. Christian reactions and responses are increasingly demanding a more careful and considered study of the Scriptures. Our own and other people's theological, philosophical and personal priorities are often readily apparent and need thoughtful awareness when participating in this dialogue.

Many people adopt a dualist, egalitarian, or supremacist position when defining masculinity, femininity and human relationships. *When the Bible refers to God using masculine terms, there is no invitation to extend our ideas of male to encompass these references to divine masculinity.* We know humanity was and is created in God's image: male and female together. This created humanity is intended to express and discover something of its unity in marriage (as Jesus' summary of the two creation stories in Matthew 19 suggests). Attempts at understanding human masculinity and femininity using biblical terms require considerable caution.

I believe that it is helpful to learn that humanity finds itself this way by no accident. Indeed, the biblical witness is that creation is as it is because of God's ultimate purposes in Christ and the church, the Lamb and his bride. It is from here that much of our biblical understanding of male and female, and marriage comes.

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[205] Priest, *In Triune Community* contains forty other NCPI seasonal school resources. The remaining seven sessions I led over around twenty years include six seminars and workshops on local church, social and educational themes plus a character study. Contrary to NCPI usage, I used inclusive language and preferred translations that follow these forms of expression.

This understanding, however, like that of Scriptural language about divine masculinity, needs to avoid fixed male-female role definitions based on biblical metaphors of Christ and the church. That relationship is a mystery involving elements that *do not apply in human contexts.* Husbands are not incarnate deities nor are they about redemptive atonement. Husbands and wives are in the bride and are 'in Christ'. They are in God's family as God's sons and daughters. Reflections on Christ and the church and the Lamb and his bride are best connected with human marriage by looking at qualities such as the Holy Spirit's fruits that nurture and mature relationships.[206]

Since discussing sexuality is grounded in God's relationship with God's redeemed people in Christ, the issues that arise are profoundly personal and deeply significant. We are not observers of God's relationship with humanity but participants in God's relationship with humanity.

This reality connects with three relevant areas. *Idolatry* (false worship) links with false love (adultery) and deals with what we value and regard as worthwhile, and what we love. *Marriage has vocation* and relates to the marriage of the bride and the Lamb. Vocation covers our personal hopes and goals, possibly including marriage, as well as broader national and cultural goals. *Ministry* involves sharing the gospel and serving one another and is inseparable from the church as the bride of the Christ and the people of God as God's family.

The issues we face surface in many human situations. To cope with these issues we should commence, and continue, with the biblical revelation of creation including sexuality, sin and restoration in the context of God's purposes and plan. Revelation 21:1–8 suggests that all valid human experience and understanding of marriage comes from God's grace. Although we may receive God's grace 'in a vain way' and find ourselves 'married' to our idols, grace is essential to the readiness of the bride for her divine partner (2 Corinthians 6:1–14, Ephesians 5:15–6:9). The practical point, and perhaps the only point, is that grace teaches us much that can help us cope with today's concerns and issues.

This emphasis correlates with Jesus' message in Matthew 19. The substance of his response remains if divorce is replaced with any of the issues and concerns that we face in our complex and confused society. Only grace frees us to love, and to love is to live in harmony with our Father, with his Son – referred to as our brother and husband – and the Holy Spirit, as well as with each other. Only grace frees us to understand biblical language in ways that do not discriminate against women or men, children or parents, workers or employers, or 'local's' or people from other ethnic groups (cf. Galatians 3:25–29).

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[206] The terms *apophatic* and *cataphatic* can help as reminders of the need to recognise what is different and unknowable as well as what correlates and is revealed. Biblical references to mystery and use of metaphorical and apocalyptic language serve as signals about these priorities. Victor Frankl's profiling of reductionism is also relevant. See Frankl, *Will to Meaning, The*, 15–30.

Marriage and the Edenic marriage

Marrying and giving in marriage

Matthew records Jesus' parable about a wedding banquet:

> Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son' (Matthew 22:1).[207]

Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven (or God) with a wedding banquet and indicated severe consequences for those who do not attend his marriage feast (Matthew 22:1–14, 25:1–13; Luke 12:32–40, 14:7–14). He inferred that his presence could be understood in his cultural setting in terms of the coming of a bridegroom (Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:18–20; Luke 5:34, 35; cf. John 3:27–29).

His comments about adultery and divorce relate to his teaching about the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:27–32; Luke 16:18). His ministry to those at the wedding at Cana, to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, and to the woman caught in adultery, shows the same gentle firmness and relational context (John 2:1–11, 4:1–42, 8:1–11).

Jesus, on another occasion, described his generation as being like that of Noah, where they were 'marrying and giving in marriage' without realising God's purposes (Matthew 24:32–42; Luke 17:26–32). Jesus emphasised this sad truth in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1–13). By contrast, he told the Sadducees, who didn't believe in resurrection, that 'in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven' (Matthew 22:23–33; Mark 12:18–27; Luke 20:27–27). Whether we are single or married, none of us in the renewed creation will be in relationships as we currently understand them. Relationships in God's eternal kingdom, in the resurrection, are completely transformed from those in this world. Whatever our current difficulties and joys, our destiny is worth contemplating.

Jesus, when asked about divorce and remarriage, spoke of marriage being a union established by God (Matthew 19:2–12; Mark 10:1–12). Christian marriage is not simply a higher, more noble, or purer ideal than aimed for by human society. It is a participation in a reality sourced and secured in God, written into God's creation, and part God's original intention and purpose. It relates to God's destiny for God's creation and finds fulfilment in God's new, renewed creation. Human

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[207] This text describes Jesus comparing God's kingdom to a regal banquet setting. It is vital, when considering this metaphor and analogy, not to infer indiscriminately back on God regal and patriarchal social contexts associated with these first century cultural metaphors. It is also important not to literalise metaphors and other rhetorical techniques including apocalyptic language. Jesus used a familiar social scene to make theological statements. I have not attempted to unpack rhetorical techniques in this paper.

marriages *participate* in eternal mysteries and *explore* mutual love. They are more than repetitions of past social arrangements.

Bridegroom and bride

When asked about divorce, Jesus' symbolism implied he was standing as a faithful bridegroom before his unfaithful bride, whom on their logic God should have already divorced! Jesus' response was to declare God's plan for history, and so for himself and his hearers. He seamlessly linked *their* two creation accounts to point out God's essential purpose in creating men and women. God is described in Genesis as creating male and female from one human being, and then joining them together in marriage.

This narrative provides aspects of a revelation and a prophecy of God's plan for human history. Since humanity is created in the image and likeness of God, God was revealing something of the essence of his own communion within his own divine being. Unity of persons in marriage is only fully realised as a divine gift-action and recognises that this co-unity is, for various reasons, not always possible (cf. Matthew 19:2–12; Genesis 1, 2).

Jesus' comments about marriage 'in the resurrection' relate to God being God 'not of the dead, but of the living' (Matthew 22:28ff; Mark 12:23; Luke 20:33ff; cf. John 11:24). Marriage has both an eternal source and an eternal destiny. This links with the mystery Paul referred to in his letter to the Ephesian church. In commenting on the same Genesis passage to which Jesus referred, Paul wrote that 'This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church' (Ephesians 5:21–33).

History can therefore be thought of as the story of bridegroom and bride:[208]

> 'To this I say, that the Son is the adequate communication of the Father's goodness … But yet the Son has also an inclination to communicate *himself*, in an image of his person that may partake of his happiness: and this was the end of the creation, even the communication of the happiness of the Son of God. … Therefore the church is said to be the completeness of Christ.' It is as and only as a factor in the plot of the triune God's inner life, that God has a need to overflow. In the *Miscellanies*, Edwards is beautifully simple: 'The end of the creation of God was to provide a spouse for his Son Jesus Christ, that might enjoy him and on whom he might pour forth his love. …'

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[208] Cultural framings of marriage should not be based solely on theological analogies. Incarnational and Trinitarian theologies need more than these biblical analogies. While analogies can distort and distract, they can also enhance and enrich redemptive and restorative insights and help people who are marginalised by inappropriate practices.

'[Heaven] and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse.' The church is *with* Christ the object in the triune love and so the purpose of creation.[209]

St. John of the Cross wrote in a similar vein regarding the incarnation of Christ and doctrine of the Trinity:

Romance: On creation

'My Son, I wish to give you a bride who will love you.
Because of you she will deserve to share our company,

and eat bread at our table, the same bread I eat,
that she may know the good I have in such a Son;
and rejoice with me in your grace and fullness'.

'I am very grateful [Father]', the Son answered;
'I will show my brightness to the bride you give me,

so that by it she may see how great my Father is,
and how I have received my being from your being.

I will hold her in my arms and she will burn with your love,
and with eternal delight she will exalt your goodness'.[210]

Beast and harlot

History is also described in the New Testament as the story of a dragon, a beast and a false prophet; and their promiscuous adulteress, the harlot who 'glorified herself and lived luxuriously'. This woman became

a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul bird, a haunt of every foul and hateful beast.

Although she declared she would 'rule as a queen', not be widowed and 'never see grief', 'her judgment comes in a single day – even a single hour' (Revelation 18:1–10)! The book of Revelation identifies this woman as a city – as Babylon (most likely also representing cities including Cain's, Nineveh and Rome). It then describes God's people in terms of the new Jerusalem that descends to earth from heaven. Augustine describes them in terms of their loves:[211]

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[209] Bingham, *Profound Mystery, The*, quoting Robert W. Jenson's quote of Jonathan Edwards, 53. Bingham's description of a divine 'need' is, in my view, inadequate, if understood in the usual sense of deficiency. It is also unwise to determine role stereotypes for human relationships directly from Trinitarian relations or from marriage metaphors involving Christ and the church.

[210] St. John of the Cross, 'Romances of St. John of the Cross, The: Romance 3 "on Creation",' http://www.karmel.at/romanzen/en/3rdRomance.

[211] For further thoughts on the book of Revelation, including comments on gender and metaphor in apocalyptic language, see Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom*. This brief essay does not refer to the wisdom

Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly city by [self-centred love], even to the point of despising God; the heavenly city by the love of God, even to the point of despising [self-centred love]. To be brief, the first city glories in itself, the second glories in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from [humanity]; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one city lifts up its head in its own glory; the other city says to its God, 'You are my glory, and the lifter up of my head.' In the one city, the princes and nations it subdues are ruled by the love of power; in the other city, princes and subjects serve one another in love, the subjects obeying, while the princes are concerned for the welfare of all. The one city delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other city says to its God, 'I will love You, O Lord, my strength.' And therefore the wise [people] of the one city, living according to [their own ungodly wisdom], have sought the advantage of their own bodies or souls, or both. … But in the other city there is no [ungodly] human wisdom, but only godliness, which offers proper worship to the true God, and looks for its reward in the society of the saints, of holy angels as well as holy [people], so that God may be all in all.[212]

Rephrasing Augustine, using links in several texts between cities and women:

Accordingly, two symbolic women have been formed by two loves: the earthly harlot by self-centred love, even to the point of despising God; the heavenly bride by the love of God, even to the point of despising self-centred love. To be brief, the harlot glories in herself, the bride glories in the Lord. For the harlot seeks human glory; but the greatest glory of the bride is God, the witness of conscience. The harlot lifts up her head in her own glory; while the bride says to her God, 'You are my glory, and the lifter up of my head.' In the harlot, the princes and nations she subdues are ruled by the love of power; in the bride, princes and subjects serve one another in love, the subjects obeying, while the bride, princes and subjects are concerned for the welfare of all. The harlot delights in her own strength, represented in the persons of her rulers; the bride says to her God, 'I will love You, O Lord, my strength.' And therefore the wise people of the harlot, living according to their own ungodly wisdom, have sought the advantage of their own bodies or souls, or both. … But in the bride there is no ungodly human wisdom, but only godliness, which offers proper worship to the true

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woman and the strange or alien woman of Proverbs 1 to 9. See *Learning to Love Wisdom* for some of my thoughts on these chapters.

[212] From Dr. Nick Needham, Winter School, Inverness, 2000: ~14:30. Cf. Augustine, 'City of God and Christian Doctrine,' https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf102.iv.XIV.28.html. Augustine's polemic about despising oneself can be reframed in the light of Jesus' affirmation that the greatest commandment involves loving neighbours *as ourselves*.

> God, and looks for its reward in the society of the saints, of holy angels as well as holy humanity, so that God may be all in all.

Reflecting on biblical salvation history from this perspective can be enriching. Considering the historical context in which the Scriptures were written, and our own biases and prejudices, is essential to this process. Care is necessary when reading the biblical stories of the marriages – of Abraham and Sarah; Isaac and Rebekah; Jacob, Leah, and Rachel; of Joseph's confrontation with Potiphar's wife; of Moses and Zipporah; of Rahab, Hannah and Elkanah, Ruth and Boaz and the rise and fall of the Davidic dynasty.[213] Tragic stories associated with these including those of Lot and Lot's wife, David and Bathsheba and David's other wives and mistresses, and Solomon and his wives (and the context of the book of the Song of Solomon) are reminders of *our* frailties and failures as well as of theirs.

Similarly, the accounts of their nation's descent into idolatry and adultery from the story of the golden calf onwards, despite God's warnings through the prophets throughout the times of the kings, can encourage caution and humility. The strategic life of Esther, and issues relating to mixed marriages during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah on the nation's return from exile, remind us that social and cultural priorities regarding marriage are not easily resolved.[214] Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Malachi refer to marriage and wrote of the unfaithfulness of God's people, and of God's steadfast love and faithfulness to his eternal covenant.

The New Testament warns against sexual immorality, being unequally yoked and presumptive divorce. It tells of Jesus' mother, Mary, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, anticipating the unveiling of God's mystery in the birth of Mary's son. It is this reality that the women who accompanied Jesus and who went early to his tomb longed for, however unaware they were of its ultimate fullness. Lydia, Priscilla, Junia and other women in leadership and public ministry in the early churches were caught in the wonder of this mystery. Paul writes metaphorically in Galatians 4:21–31 of Hagar and Sarah when referring to the slavery and liberty of the two covenants that find their *telos* in the apocalyptic references to two women in Revelation 17 to 19.[215]

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[213] The stories of Ruth and Hannah come historically after the tragic last chapters of the book of Judges.

[214] They are also indicators that beliefs about God and God's purposes are influenced by these social and cultural priorities.

[215] Women's voices are understated but important to understanding the biblical narrative. See Priest, *Learning to Love Wisdom* for a discussion about the Wisdom woman and the strange or foreign woman of Proverbs 1 to 9. Care is needed so that biblical patriarchal narratives are not assumed to define patriarchy as theologically valid. Themes from Mary's song are in Jesus' preaching at Nazareth and his Sermon on the Mount – and also in the letter of James – suggesting that Mary's understanding of God and her nation's servitude to Rome influenced Jesus from an early age.

Entering Eden

<u>Bride and husband</u>

The full biblical story of marriage begins in Eden and moves forward to the marriage of the Lamb and his bride in the New Jerusalem. This marriage was 'from the beginning', as Jesus pointed out in Matthew 19:2–12. While Paul had this beginning in mind in Ephesians 5:21–33, he saw the present relationship of Christ and the church as Jesus Christ intending

> to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

This passage provides a context for the vision in Revelation 19ff.

Ignoring this view of divine marriage can reduce human marriages to human contracts which may or may not be helpful for the couple, their children (if they have children) and society. These contracts may be deemed acceptable while they are mutually convenient, for as long each other's idiosyncrasies are tolerable, and provided vulnerable partners are not being abused.[216]

Marriage in the Eden narrative was no sooner formed by God than it was broken by humanity, and the couple were both placed in exile out of Eden. Entry back into Eden would be by the same pathway as the one given to the thief on the cross!

The testimonies of 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, Revelation 21:1–8 and 22:10–15 state that there is no room in this renewed Eden – the new creation which is God's paradise – for unrepentant sinners (Revelation 2:7). Entry into a renewed Eden is entry into the New Jerusalem, and entry into the New Jerusalem means sharing in the marriage banquet of the bride and the Lamb. The shroud of death is removed and new life and healing flourish (Isaiah 25:1–9; cf. Jeremiah 7:34, 16:9, 25:10, 33:11).

Marriage and singleness as we know them are transcended. Just as there is no temple in the heavenly city, marriage finds its completion and perfection in the communion that is between Christ and his bride – the one flesh unity in which we 'become participants of the divine nature'.[217]

The new Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, continually comes down to earth from heaven (Revelation 21:2). Entry into God's kingdom means entry now into this marriage. It comes to be received as a grace-gift from God.

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[216] Both the spiritual significance and the contractual nature of marriage provide core reasons for separation and protection when abuse, including physical violence, is occurring. The safety and welfare of vulnerable partners should never be compromised because of the levels of importance attached to marriage; the opposite reality is surely indicated.

[217] Mutual participation is central to biblical teaching about marriage – not power, privilege, patronage, or prominence by one party, especially the male 'partner'. Importing doctrines from biblical references to first century cultural practises is poor theology, and, in my view, pushes metaphors too far.

Husband and bride

Jesus Christ fulfils God's covenant promises to tabernacle among us; to be our God and ensure we are his people (2 Peter 1:3; Revelation 21:1–4). The son described in Revelation 12, the warrior-king depicted Revelation 19:11–21 (cf. with Ephesians 5:21ff and 6:10ff), and the Lamb who is seen unrolling history in Revelation 5, are different descriptions that complement but not define the profile of this bride's husband.[218]

All that was established originally in Eden was to be lived in harmony with the word of God. Renewed Eden is now only entered and lived in by the same Word – the Word who was with God, and who was God, and who came to his own home but was despised and rejected by his own people (John 1:1–18). This Word-become-flesh trod the winepress of God's insistence on holy love alone when faced with vileness and evil. No-one else came to save God's people. No other redeemer, husband or lover helped them (Isaiah 54, 59, 62 and 66:5–14)!

The fruit of the tree of life is only eaten when exiled humanity is the redeemed, forgiven bride of the Lamb. She is then 'clothed with fine linen, bright and pure', has washed her 'robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' and shares in the fullness of the blessings of God, poured out into all eternity at the Lamb's marriage supper (Revelation 7:13–17; 19:1–10).

While no marriage should be entered lightly, this marriage *is* to be entered! God's people are all given the gift of *this* marriage:

> The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom's face;
> I will not gaze at glory, but on my king of grace –
> not at the crown he gifteth, but on his piercèd hand:
> the Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's land.[219]

Marriage in the church

These insights can help us better consider marriage and family in the household of God. We can use these insights to reflect on the nature of the callings and ministries of those who lead and serve in the church and in the community – as well as in our homes where all are, in some senses, children and siblings, and many are spouses and parents.[220]

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[218] Care is need not to blur different metaphors or merge them into a portrayal which is then used to define fixed human gender roles and justify male power-based domination.

[219] Anne R. Cousin, 'The Sands of Time Are Sinking,' http://cyberhymnal.org/htm/s/a/sandtime.htm.

[220] As mentioned, these insights are not intended to define male and female roles or to designate super-ordained or subordinated functions. They primarily have in mind ways of living in the *gifting* that flows from the *new life* described in Ephesians 4. Both men and woman are to therefore 'be imitators of God, as beloved children, and [to] live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Ephesians 5:1, 2). Paul's subsequent comments about husbands emphasise

These understandings can better equip us for complex issues relating to marriage, including divorce. They can help us facilitate ministries that preference orphans, widows and widowers, and those outside the boundaries of our communities. They can help us increase our honouring of our spouses and parents and our partnerships with those who are single (cf. Exodus 20:12; Psalms 65, 128, 144).

Neither marriage or singleness are easy, especially given their significance in the purposes of God and the hatred of evil for anything pure. It is essential that those not in marriage relationships are not seen as deficient, and that they are highly valued and not marginalised within communities.

Marriage is honourable and prophetic. God's purposes in creating humanity destine redeemed women and men to share in the marriage of the bride and the Lamb regardless of their current circumstances.

The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, sustains us in whatever situations we find ourselves and enables us to care for each other. God's grace is always needed, as Paul reminds husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:15–33 and Colossians 3:12–25 (cf. 1 Corinthians 6, 7, 11; 2 Corinthians 6; 1 Peter 3:1–12). It is in this faithfulness that God keeps his people – as the end of both Testaments boldly declare (Malachi 2:10–3:6; Revelation 19 to 22).

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the way husbands are to love their wives – ways *contrary* to patriarchal and paternalistic domination. It is, according to Paul, in this way that we please the Lord and wake up, rise from the dead, and know Christ shining on us!

> Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:15–21).

Theological perspectives

Introduction

Questions about gender, sexuality, marriage and ministry are often approached from a variety of perspectives. Some of these relate to core theologies about the Trinity, the incarnation and the atonement.[221] The way communities relate to those beyond them, and the way relationships occur within them are informed by their views of these theological understandings. Inclusive and exclusive practices are evident in hierarchies within communities as well as in attitudes towards those outside of them.

Trinitarian perspectives

Writers have nominated a variety of trinitarian approaches to gender issues, but the variety itself suggests there may be significant dangers in being too quick to make connections between the divine nature and human gender and sexuality.[222] Nonetheless, since humanity images God, there must be some reflection of God's being in human persons collectively and individually. The image and likeness metaphors in Scripture connect with parenting, while the use of parent metaphors to describe God and God's relationship with his people have implications for human families.

Language

The biblical language used for God's names is predominantly if not exclusively masculine, even though God is not a masculine replica of human maleness. The metaphorical Wisdom Woman in Proverbs and the birthing process of the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel correlate with feminine attributes, also do not define divine gender. It seems to me that basing statements about a women's or a man's permissible functions and roles solely on their gender is only appropriate regarding

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[221] In additions to early reading, books on the Trinity referenced in Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom* include Emery, *Trinity, The: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*; Giles, *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*; *Trinity & Subordinationism, The: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate*; Letham, *Holy Trinity, The: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*; O'Collins, *Tripersonal God, The*. Baillie's insights frame his informative incarnational theology: Baillie, *God Was in Christ*. Adam J. Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015) provides a helpful overview of aspects of atonement theology. Also, Fleming Rutledge, *Crucifixion, The: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015). Cf. Mark D. Baker, *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Academic, 2006); Mark D. Baker and Joel B. Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011); Derek Flood, *Healing the Gospel: A Radical Vision for Grace, Justice, and the Cross* (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Cascade Books, 2012); *Disarming Scripture: Cherry-Picking Liberals, Violence-Loving Conservatives, and Why We All Need to Learn to Read the Bible Like Jesus Did* (San Francisco, USA: Metanoia Books, 2014); John Colwell, *Why Have You Forsaken Me?: A Personal Reflection on the Experience of Desolation* (Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, UK: Paternoster Press, 2009).

[222] Stackhouse Jr., *Partners in Christ*, 93ff.

physiological differences. Decisions about the public and personal roles and functions that can be effectively filled by women and men need other constructs than those that privilege men over women.

Understanding biblical language involves exploring and interpreting original contexts. Attempts at avoiding questions about original historical and cultural settings are likely to result in implicit or explicit transferal of contemporary settings onto ancient narratives and vice-versa – processes that help create distorted conclusions.

Hierarchy

Subordinationist views see a gender hierarchy inherent in humanity's design and function. They therefore suggest that egalitarians want all hierarchies removed. But the story is not that simple. Issues regarding function and ontology, and their connections, readily emerge, as do their relation to humanity's struggles in a world of sin, evil and death.

Hierarchies are not exclusive to religious communities. People inevitably find themselves, or put themselves, 'above' or 'below' others in a variety of social contexts. Hierarchical order in one context may be reversed in a different setting. These structures are usually based on roles which are not defined by and so not dependent on one person's essential identity. Where hierarchical order is determined by race, gender, or social and economic factors, then assigned roles can be expected to discriminate and differentiate in ways that marginalise and exclude people independent of their social abilities and efforts. The hymn *All things bright and beautiful* describes a form of this hierarchy:

> The rich man in his castle
> The poor man at his gate
> God made them high and lowly
> and ordered their estate.[223]

Not only are we invited to sing about rich and poor *men* and not wealthy or impoverished *women*; we are expected to accept that social status is irrevocable and irreversible. These nominated 'truths' are not to be grieved over but are to be greeted as 'bright and beautiful' and 'wise and wonderful' divine works. Gender roles and social and economic positions are seen as 'made' and not achieved. Status is innate to one's being and not the result of changeable conditions. One wonders whether the author saw racial differences and issues the same way.

The reference to 'all creatures' may imply that hierarchies involving humanity, other creatures and the physical environment are reflected within humanity through gender, race and class orderings, and possibly within religious governance.

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[223] Cecil Frances Alexander, 'All Things Bright and Beautiful,'
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Things_Bright_and_Beautiful.

All people are certainly not equal in this worldview, nor are some simply more equal than others! In fact, issues about equality are irrelevant and even irreverent. Power, profile, position, prominence and privilege in this narrative are seen to belong only to certain divinely ordained elites.

Authority and Submission

The way in which hierarchies are understood theologically raises questions about the nature of God as Father, Son and Hoy Spirit, and the ways in which they choose to express themselves as one God. God is not scientifically observable or open for inspection like a piece of real estate. The Holy Spirit moves where the Spirit wills,[224] and the Spirit's actions are not always if ever immediately evident. Human actions relate to multiple persons and differ from those of three unique divine persons. Care and caution are needed to avoid confusion between divine and human activity. Terms like function and role need careful definition if they are to be used at all.

Hierarchical trinitarian understandings can lead to distorted conclusions:

- Stating that the Spirit is simply the Spirit of the Father and the Son can lead to the Spirit being considered as the love-transaction between the Father and the Son. The Spirit can then be described as a transactional It, leading to binitarian rather than trinitarian thinking.

- Seeing the Father-Son relationship as primarily between God and a human person leads to subordinationism, in effect if not in intent. One consequence of this way of thinking is that the Father has monarchical authority with the Son in fully subordinated submission. This interpretation can then be used as a pattern for all power, whether state, religion, marriage, family or vocation. All relationships are structured by this totalitarian binary with its superior dominant superordinates and inferior pliant subordinates.

- Focusing on roles and functions rather than divine persons and relations can result in modalism where one God reveals God's-self in different ways.

- Questioning, querying, expressing concern or complaining is therefore by definition ontologically insubordinate and requires rehabilitation and re-education. 'Insubordinate' civilians, laity and women are to be treated as the forbidden or strange woman: they are defined as fragile, weak, emotional, unloving etc. *They* are always the problem, not the 'in-superordinates', and never the divinely sanctioned hierarchy!

- Women's rights and gender equality are threats. Women's health is marginalised, women are isolated from male-privileged leadership and

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[224] Cf. John 3:8; Genesis 1:2.

responsibility. Abuse such as domestic violence, paedophilia, workplace exploitation, slavery, racial discrimination is structurally hidden and reactive and illicit sexuality emerges as a defying phenomenon.

Incarnational perspectives

The main way I have seen the incarnation used to empower and enforce male privilege and to marginalise and silence women from mutual participation in church leadership and ministry is by using passages such as 1 Corinthians 11, 12 and 14, Ephesians 5 and others in the pastoral Pauline letters. I have observed subordination hierarchies established without adequate regard for the contextual narratives and the cultural and historical evidence from the book of Acts or in Paul's greetings to the women and men with whom he shared ministry in various locations or a more careful reading of these passages.

These approaches seem to me to fall short and to distort the original texts as well as to provide a basis for privileged leaders to dictate and demand required behaviours by loyal followers. The crucial passages nominated then become useful generators for exercising power, exalting position and elevating profile. They aid ambitious and arrogant leaders in concealing unacceptable behaviours by coercive and controlling leadership practices.

Headship

> But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3).

One does not have to read much to discover that the word for head is not equivalent to the first century notion of leader, or to notice that its Hebrew equivalents are not used in either of the Genesis creation accounts.

A further concern then arises. It is a big leap to assume that Paul's reference to headship in his cultural and theological context immediately applies without translation to modern understandings of authority in churches and homes.

Paul's own commentary indicates some of his concerns:

> For a man … is the image and reflection [glory] of God; but woman is the reflection [glory] of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. … Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God (1 Corinthians 11:7–12).

Since Christ has leadership and authority over women and men, Paul is hardly likely to have male-only headship as his dominant thought. It is more likely that

Paul was summarising the second creation narrative about origins and including a Christological, incarnational emphasis. *This emphasis centres on verse 11 where the apostle wrote about interdependence not dominance.* His 'nevertheless' was therefore aimed at shifting his readers from unilateral understandings of image, glory and benefit to ones that are more mutual and reciprocal. In doing so, Paul was making significant comments about God-in-Christ: the eternal triune God and the incarnate and historical Messiah Jesus are in some senses interdependent. The glory of Christ Jesus was in his Father's honouring of him and in his honouring of his Father, to use a little Johannine language.

To not only demand that headship is about leadership and that leadership is about a controlling, totalitarian and dictatorial authority where – despite claims regarding sacrificial and servant-like behaviours – subordinated wives (in families) or women (in churches) are to be silent in educational, ministry and leadership activities where men might otherwise encounter their voices, views and votes, and to also insist that this absolute interpretation applies without exception in every place and time, is to damage the sensitivities and destroy the sensibilities evident in the original texts.

I see little in the Genesis narratives or these first century documents that does other than recognise and respect male and female diversity and the benefits that come from men and women in leadership, ministry and marriage working together to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow, and to receive each other's insights in public and private settings.

It has been pointed out that first century Jewish communities had learning contexts in which their Scriptures were taught and debated, and where silences only applied to those who had not had opportunity to learn or who were unhelpfully disruptive. Evidence about the churches to which Paul wrote suggests he endorsed and encouraged these educational practices by including women and men, non-Jewish and Jewish believers, and slaves and masters.

Doctrinal Christology and the historical Jesus

Just as portraying the LORD in the Old Testament and Father-God in the New Testament as extrapolations of human masculinity are reductions, so describing Jesus Christ as the perfect male-husband in a cultural role and function narrative is similarly reductionist and harmful.

These issues warrant a closer consideration of 1 Corinthians 11:3.

> But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ.

Paul's declaration begins and ends with Christ. This simple bookend structure places marriage relationships in the centre. Who is Paul's Christ? What is Paul's Christology? Paul had just urged them to imitate him in the same way he imitated

Christ. He reasons about imaging and reflecting and then highlights mutual interdependence 'in the Lord'. He mentions women having a symbol of authority not as subordinates to men but as super-ordinates having authority over angels *as the sequential pinnacle of created glory* (1 Corinthians 11:7–12).

This Christological question is necessary and vital if Christ and the church are as Paul explained to the Ephesian church – and as the Gospels and the Apocalypse of John indicate:

> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her … so that she may be holy and without blemish. … For [everyone] nourishes and tenderly cares for [their bodies], just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:25–32).

The God-Christ-Humanity profile in 1 Corinthians 11 comes after the God-Moses-Israel account in the previous chapter – an outline that segues into a God-Christ-Israel story. Who is Paul's Christ, to whom men and women were to live in mutual subjection because of their reverence for Christ? Paul's comments about a husband's headship was derived from his reading of Genesis about a man leaving his parents and being joined with his wife as one flesh, and not about unilateral rule and domination.

It seems to me impossible to comprehend Paul's Christology and his subsequent thoughts about marriage without having clear insights into his understanding of Christ's incarnation. Without wanting to generalise too quickly, it is not easy to disconnect anything Paul says about Christ from him indicating that God was in Christ and that Christ is in God. The historical Jesus was not someone who was only later seen as a Christological divine being.

Seeing an incarnational thrust to Paul's teaching about women and men should set cautions and warnings for those who make bold claims about headship, authority and superordination and who require women (and lay-people) to be silent, passive, submissive and to live quietly even when treated shamefully.

I believe that the more those of us who are husbands consider the incarnational nature of Paul's Christology, the more we will *not* consider male headship something to be demanded or expected or desired but something to be died to in a *kenotic* reformation from worldly ambition, arrogance and entitlement to a *pleroma* where their fullness is seen by our love for another person with whom we are now one and with whom we live in mutual subjection.

A truly incarnational Christology sees harmony and unity in Jesus' humanity and divinity – the will of human others with whom he shared flesh and blood and the will of the divine Other were his priorities, not his own headship.

The sacramental perspectives about baptism and the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 bookend Paul's discussion about imitating Christ and about human interdependence. Philippians 2, Ephesians 4 and 5 and Galatians emphasise inclusive and sacrificial relationships based on human community and mutuality, and not about stifling, silencing and subordinating.

The eschatological visions expressed in terms of the marriage of the Lamb and his bride in the book of Revelation and the parables regarding marriage in the synoptic Gospels also need to be considered incarnationally and not simply used to generate subordinated culturally specific roles and functions for men and women in churches and marriages. New Testament eschatology is Christ-centred. It is informed by beliefs in Jesus' resurrection and ascension; in him now being enthroned in his Father's presence; in him coming again in glory at the end of the ages. These themes have no direct parallels in male-female power structures – in marriage, church or society.

Atonement perspectives

Harmony and accord

I regard at least two truths about atonement theology as essential. The first is that there is complete harmony between the divine persons. God the Father, for example, never acts against God the Son in Jesus Christ in some form of divine judgement. Divine wrath is never directed onto Jesus even when Jesus died on the cross. Whatever divine wrath is, it is a divine rejection of and repulsion towards sin and evil, deceit and dishonesty, and callousness and cruelty.

The other essential truth is that God's innate qualities, God's holiness, truth, righteousness, love and goodness, for example, all flow in the same direction with the same intention – to show mercy and grace towards every human person and for the benefit of every molecule and atom. Or, reciprocally, grace and mercy flow in cascades and fountains of holiness, truth, righteousness, love and goodness to all creatures and for all creation, bringing reconciliation and restoration to a broken and bewildered humanity.

These truths both dismantle notions of hierarchical privilege and power. They reshape perceived ontological hierarchical structures into collaborative and cooperative communities where silence is not a condition for acceptance and accord. When the Holy Spirit moves over the depths of human and creational identity, there is a divine Word, and when two people participate in meaningful relationships, both have voices, both express views and both have votes.

The atonement illustrates and illuminates this reality. Indeed, the atonement insists on it as the divine order. God was in Christ reconciling the world to God's-self. Our eternal safety and security are because of the advocacy of God the Father with God the Son, an intercessory intervention within and beyond us which is empowered and revealed by God the Holy Spirit.

This understanding is in stark contrast to teaching that God the Son is subordinate to God the Father in some intra-Trinitarian power structure. It is a rejection of marriage relationships where equality is irrelevant because all authority is with the husband and to which his wife must submit in silence, or to whom alone she must express any form of dissent. It is a refutation of ecclesiastical structures which demand silence from all women as women are, by definition, laypeople, and silence from laymen unless invited.

Leaders and helpers

Father son and husband wife constructs based on God-Christ-man and man-woman hierarchies are usually quick to refer to the Genesis 2 creation account and claim Adam's prior and Eve's subsequent creations are about leader and led, helped and helper (though *helped* is usually left tacit).

Psalm 46 and other passages are seemingly ignored:

> God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah.

> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

> Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

> 'Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.' The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Helpers lead and those helped are led. Adam and Eve were both to lead – her leadership was in being a helper-partner for him as her companion helper-partner. Adam's was to be ready for her and would receive, server and honour her as his companion in acts of mutual leadership and helping for each other's benefits – acts that would enrich the entire creation through their family and co-vocations as parents and as productive resourceful innovators in and beyond Eden.

Misguided notions of leadership and helpers emerge when a God-Christ-man construct becomes God-minister-laypeople and God-husband-wife structures where ministers and husbands are expected to be saviours and laypeople and wives are supposed to be saved. Reading the mutual subjection in Ephesians 5 in the context of Philippians 2 suggests that Paul's Christology was about Christ Jesus

acting as a servant and helper and not as a dominating deity demanding humanity act as its helper.

Inclusive perspectives

Upside down

One difficulty in reflecting on biblical references to inclusion is that they are so abundant. The core Scriptural narrative is of revulsion and rejection of hierarchal power and its inevitably destructive anti-God results. From the first couple's exile out of Eden and Cain's murder of Abel, to the Genesis accounts of God's favour on subordinated sons, to Israel's exodus from slavery and their tensions with neighbouring tribes, readers are presented with a litany against power, privilege, patronage and position being used to prosper evil and oppose good.

Israel's violence against other nations and turmoil under judges and kings reinforces this core narrative until self-immolation invites other tyrannical nations to overwhelm them and exile them in foreign lands. Israel's restoration repeats the same patterns of inner violence and external oppression as is recorded in inter-Testament documents before Jesus presents the radical alternate of a heavenly realm of non-violence which opposes the belligerent and brutal behaviours of racial, religious, economic, social and political hierarchies.

Jesus' kingdom did not involve domination as in these earlier regimes. The greatest are the least and these people – women and men from various social contexts – are those whose attention is on the welfare of other people.

One of the modern (and ancient) traps is where hierarchical religious and political leaders seeking to achieve their own ambitions and entitlements use euphemisms about friendship and relationships towards those they regard as inferior and whom they decide are subordinates, to get and to gain, to exploit and manipulate, and to distort and dismiss. By the time their duplicity, deceit and dishonesty are exposed, their damage is done to those who wrongly trusted that God's goodness and grace was the reality in which these leaders believed. This kind of leader avoids trust, transparency and truth leaving those whose faithfulness and generosity included forgiveness, forbearance and hope abandoned and appalled.

Community relationships and relational communities sadly become dry deserts as departures decimate landscapes destroyed by leaders whose self-enjoyment and self-promotion determined their behaviours and skewed their theologies.

Gifts and fruit

Authentic leaders give, they help and are generous without calculating whether they will look better for what they do. Their goals are in the welfare of other people and not in their own magnificence. Gifts are shared in mutual hospitality with fruits evident in the lives of other people. Hierarchies are the upside-down ones where the glory and honour of other people has preference over their own, where

the 'hierarchy' in Philippians 2 is in full bloom and the Galatians 'hierarchy' excludes the Petrine error at Antioch in favour of one that honours God's actions in calling Abraham:

> But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:25–29).

The true shape and structure of the human family is then outlined by Paul in terms of being adopted as God's children – an adoption which is far more than an adaption as it results from God 'sending the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying "Abba, Father!"' (Galatians 4:6). The inheritance this family receives is seen in the Spirit's fruit – the Spirit's harvest – in the eternal life that flows from not being wearied by worldliness. It is this harvest that was God's triune intention in the incarnation and realised in and by Jesus' death and resurrection through the atonement. It is this harvest that establishes a new creation (Galatians 5:22–6:18).

These themes about giving saturate the New Testament (Cf. John 3:16; Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 12, 2 Corinthians 3–5; Ephesians 4:1–16; James 1:17, 18). References to fruitfulness are abundant in the Sermon on the Mount, parables in the Synoptic Gospels, signs in John's Gospel, in the upper room discourse and in other contexts.

Two things seem clear. Ideas about silencing subordinates for the benefit of superiors is absent from discourses about gifts and fruits. Secondly, notions about excluding and marginalising people in hierarchical structures are absent as a cavalcade of renewed humanity cascades torrents of joy together in thankfulness to God for God's grace and mercy, and a harvest of peace and goodness results when reconciliation involves honesty, respect, openness and accountability.

Conclusion: Paul's love-lament

1 Corinthians 13 remains one of the most remarkable and well-known biblical passages from the first century Jesus movement. It is usually considered as a doxology of delight, an anthem of affection and a symphony of joy.

I have no recollection of hearing it as a one of Paul's laments – as one of his griefs and anguishes written in the stream of Hebrew laments. I also have no memory of hearing that it was written by a first century author aligned with the ancient wisdom-writer, Koheleth. Just as Ecclesiastes was framed by an editor or by the original author and just as Ecclesiastes was written with heartfelt realism rather than in a spirit of despair or cynicism, so Paul's love poem can be thought of as a response to the megaphoning, self-virtue-signalling mega-apostles whose self-

exaltation was contrary to everything Jesus said and did, and to Paul's own teaching and ministry.

Paul's love-poem was not aimed at yet-to-be-submissive subordinates. If anything, he wanted to provide *another way* for the hierarchically minded God-us-everyone crowd with their perverse and distorted manipulation of passages like 1 Corinthians 11:3 for their own glory.

Love-lament

> I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

These first verses sound to me like Koheleth's lament that nothing under the sun has wisdom or purpose. Only that aligned with the Creator makes sense, and the best way forward is by conviviality with other like-minded people.

Paul's conclusion focuses on the transience of prophecies, tongues, knowledge and reasoning – themes Koheleth also saw passing away, as in his description of vanity. Paul's final lament about the temporal nature of faith and hope was also a longing, just as Koheleth or his frame-editor hoped for some eternal purpose when our mortal bodies cease to be functional, and we die. The only permanent reality is love, and that for Paul, requires humility and kindness, not power and prestige.

Hierarchies of love are highways of humility provided by hosts committed to honour and hospitality. They are sustained by truth, trust and transparency:

> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Paul's love lament was written to a community engulfed in disputes, difficulties and dissention. Its magnitude is partly in its relevance to his aches and anguish for all the communities with which he had contact. It reflects his longings and indicates his struggles as he faced his own frailty and weakness, including while languishing in prison. One thing mattered – and it wasn't insisting on power structures that silenced and subordinated people, especially women, slaves and non-Jews, using some supposedly ontological, functional, role-based system of hierarchical power.

The reality of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, seen in the incarnate and atoning life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and experienced by the personal

action of God's anointing Holy Spirit, points to a different destiny and future reality – just as Paul wrote to the Roman believers in Romans 8:

> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Gender wars

The battle between people with so-called complementarian views and others with egalitarian perspectives is ongoing. Subordinating women under male headship is irrevocable and irreversible within the complementarian position, making subordinationism a more suitable opposite term to egalitarianism. Egalitarians look for mutual, cooperative and collaborative relationships without men being exclusive and default rulers in marriages, churches and society. Mutualism is a better opposite to complementarianism.

These two views do not enter this conflict as equals. Condescending subordinationist patriarchy has a long history in society and church. Egalitarians are usually seen in conservative circles as rebels and insurgents who threaten the patriarchal status quo. Egalitarian views are often understood by subordinationists as belonging to liberal theology, as part of a slippery slope towards moral decay, and so as a threat to the gospel, the church and broader society. In my experience, it is rare that these people apply the slippery-slope metaphor in the other direction from their presumed authoritative view, with a possible downhill slide from benevolent patriarchy into domestic violence, predatory sexual abuse and female servitude and slavery.

Subordinationist views are usually based on two central assessments. One is that Eve's moral and spiritual failure is central to the Genesis narrative and determinative for Christian and community practice. The other assumption is that Genesis 2 and references in the Epistles indicate that male headship means authority and was in-built at creation. Both assessments are used to provide a theological basis for excluding, discriminating and marginalising women from a range of forms of church leadership and ministry. Both judgements generate cultural stereotypes that see women primarily, if not exclusively, as homemakers, child-bearers and child-carers, and marriage partners.

'It wasn't roaring, it was weeping'[225]

When I was studying at university, I hoped evangelicals would move to a more mutualist and a less role driven approach to human relationships. In the years that followed I was disappointed to find that the gender issue became a stronger not a weaker boundary marker for evangelicals. For 'godly' people, husbands were boss, and wives were to behave. By contrast, other supposedly less spiritual Christians ordained women and were casual and careless about divorce and remarriage. Mutualism was seen to create a house divided, which, of course, would not survive (cf. Matthew 12:25).

Women who were separated from their partners and did not remarry were seen as being more spiritual than those who remarried, while little, if any, discussion about

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[225] Dan Heymann, 'Weeping,' http://www.weeping.info/Weeping-lyrics.html.

unwelcome male behaviour occurred. Some men who remarried apparently did so because their former wives had resisted their then husband's spiritual calling. Women in evangelical communities were expected to be silent workers in the background, with their own exclusive Bible studies, and available for courtship, marriage and motherhood should they be selected by privileged men. These descriptions were usually aligned with a patriarchal interpretation of Proverbs 1 to 9 and 31 where loyal wives are seen as hard-working, quiet and compliant, while forbidden women are pictured as threatening the future of godly families.[226]

This hierarchical approach can readily reinforce and potentially increase power differentials in male led churches and Christian organisations. In these communities, power-based problems can be easily exacerbated. Consider, for example, what happens if a woman experiences what she sees as inappropriate behaviour from one of an all-male team of supposedly 'godly' clergy, leaders, speakers or teachers. Her concerns are assessed by an exclusive men's club who may be perceived as engaging in group thinking and in closing ranks for the sake of the 'gospel ministry' and the 'church community' (cf. John 11:49, 50). If those who are concerned for her speak up in her support, the same response may occur to them, only stronger. An inversion process results where the original issue is avoided and attention is directed towards perceived or actual weaknesses in anyone who questions the leaders' male dominated views.

The language leadership uses regarding disaffected people may describe characteristics seen to align with the leaders' supposedly biblical gender stereotypes. Subordinates are to be accepting, loving and unquestioning, and so those questioning leaders may be criticised for lacking these qualities. Insubordinates are expected to be critical, disruptive, inconvenient, and not robust enough – in contrast to the leaders' presumed strengths! They may also be called weak, emotional or contentious, using similar language to that which describes the disobedient wife (Proverbs 21:9, 19, 25:24)! The message is clear: male leaders are objective, tough, resilient and capable of accurately evaluating and acting regarding issues affecting women, while insubordinate people, especially women, are emotional, subjective, unstable, swayed by poor judgement, have unrealistic expectations, and bring division and disunity.

This inversion process avoids accountability by tacitly and actively telling the community that criticism of leaders is never appropriate. The boundary marker for the 'noble' patriarchy is in subordinates fulfilling passive stereotypical gender aligned roles and behaviours. In such situations, leaders present themselves as impeccable and beyond correction, comment, question or criticism, while anyone who criticises them finds themselves placed outside of community life. Such a person would be treated like the forbidden woman of Proverbs 1 to 9. Patriarchy

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[226] See Priest, *Learning to Love Wisdom* for further thoughts on Proverbs 1–9.

becomes a non-negotiable assumption, a core rigidity, of the community. Gender perspectives describe the boundary conditions for group membership.

This pattern of leadership has similarities to male bullies who accuse another 'weaker' man of being a 'sissy' or a 'sook'. It 'works' for the bully because the disaffected parties eventually move on, so proving to the leadership that these people are 'birds with broken wings' beyond help.[227] The dominant patriarchy sends its message:

> Fit in or leave. Rather than address issues, we find scapegoats whom we silence and send away. Remember, we, the leaders, have everyone's interests at heart, and those who leave obviously *are* problems rather than *have* problems arising from anything we do or have done.

Dissenters may experience leaders providing empty, euphemistic so-called apologies that say sorry for nothing except the perceptions of the wronged party! These confessions may seem personal, but often aim to avoid official responses or formal accountability.[228] These veiled responses assist in avoiding any organisational acknowledgement about anything potentially remiss.

This kind of behaviour contrasts with that of Zacchaeus or the woman Jesus met at the Samaritan well. Disaffected people may find that while theological and cultural links between confession, repentance, restitution and reconciliation are not hard to find, this kind of patriarchy does not practice them when dealing with their own failures. There is, for example, no liturgy whereby church leaders confess their failures to the laity. Priestly liturgy reserves the role of pronouncing forgiveness to the clergy, leaving a confessional vacuum for those occasions when ordained ministers fail.

This form of patriarchal domination can generate male leaders who trade on privilege, power, profile and position by disenfranchising those who fail to be obsequious acolytes, subordinated to their 'godly' male leadership. Anyone who exposes their patterns of behaviour, must, of course, be unforgiving, justice demanding, bitter, resentful, and unwilling to ignore what they see as inappropriate and unacceptable behaviours. Such persons are usually all too easily described as having 'history', rather than as possessing a legitimate narrative of response learned in the crucible of life's frailties and failures.

The experience of the disenfranchised may however be far less aligned with the description of the perversity of the forbidden women of Proverbs. While the powerful parade themselves as virtuous amid the failures and weaknesses of others,

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[227] A euphemism used among NCPI leadership for people who did not respond appropriately to pastoral initiatives.

[228] That is, handwritten and/or come from private, home addresses rather than as official documents.

the story of the vulnerable may be all too much like the racially marginalised describe in *Weeping*:[229]

> It doesn't matter now it's over anyhow
> He tells the world that it's sleeping
> But as the night came round
> I heard its lonely sound
> It wasn't roaring, it was weeping.

Hearing angels sing

The measure of good theology is in its fruits, rather than in valid ends being used to justify invalid means! Leaders are to lead people without following a pattern of enthuse, use, excuse, abuse and dispose. Leaders are to do more than groom people to sacrifice their time, energy, expertise and money. Leaders are to do more than profile themselves as needing praise, prayer, pity, payment and practical support. Leaders are to lead, dying to selfish ambition, rather than denigrating a layperson's supposed propensity for glory, while being seemingly oblivious to their own dangers.

The gender debate has implications where approaches to women's issues become boundary markers, with cultural patriarchy serving as a core rigidity in the structural and organic life of Christian organisations and churches. Essential questions can be sensitively asked: What are the implications for pastoral care for those who are effectively categorised as forbidden? What does it mean to align with those who are marked as strange, alien and foreign to this evangelical sub-culture? Are exclusive gender-privileged patriarchal hierarchies essential to gospel and church life?

In attempting to answer these questions, God's voice and the voice of those forbidden and estranged by the patriarchy needs to be heard. In the Proverbs 1 to 9 narrative, the father and his son are to listen to a metaphorical wisdom woman. She speaks God's word of wisdom to the world in the streets and at the city gates, and not simply from the sanctuary through a law-prophet narrative. She calls out in the streets from her house-temple, and patriarchs are to listen to and worship the LORD with her, under her authority. Without her wisdom and her voice expressing her wisdom, deviant and defiant voices seduce the patriarchy, bring its demise. It is hard to see ways the patriarchal father and his family could discern the voice of the wisdom woman from the sayings of the forbidden woman if *all* women were silent and separated!

The fear of the LORD, which is the beginning of wisdom and insight, is needed. The LORD is the creator of all things, of all that we know as male and female. The LORD, though usually described in male language in the Hebrew Scriptures, is

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[229] Heymann, 'Weeping'. Cf. 'I am the strange woman', Priest, *Learning to Love Wisdom*, 102.

neither male nor female in the sense we know masculinity and femininity. And the LORD is represented in the book of Proverbs through this wisdom woman. While not divine, she depicts God's voice to the world, a world reaching beyond Israel to other nations.[230]

Without exploring at this point whether the bookends of Proverbs are constructing a narrative to point Israel and the nations beyond the cultural stereotypes of the patriarchy described in-between, it is not unrealistic to look for teleological aspirations in the text. If some future hope is anticipated, then perhaps the forbidden woman is a wise warning for the patriarchy. Perhaps leaders can reflect on the ways patriarchy may marginalise, discriminate and disenfranchise other people, and increases the difficulties faced by those who are excluded. Perhaps patriarchs as well as egalitarians need to be more careful lest they confuse wisdom with folly!

The wisdom woman, representing the LORD's promises of restoration and hope, has a message for the forbidden woman. Hearing true and authentic testimony from those excluded by patriarchy can help navigation through the gender wars.

Perhaps the wisdom woman correlates with the angels who appeared to the shepherds with a message of good-will, peace and divine pleasure confirming the birth of a Messiah-Saviour (Luke 2):

> Still through the cloven skies they come
> with peaceful wings unfurled,
> and still their heavenly music floats
> o'er all the weary world.

Perhaps this message needs hearing afresh amid the gender debate. Perhaps the hymn-writer is singing rich truth when speaking to people disenfranchised and discriminated by racial, gender, social or economic biases:

> And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
> whose forms are bending low,
> who toil along the climbing way
> with painful steps and slow,
> look now! for glad and golden hours
> come swiftly on the wing.
> O rest beside the weary road,
> and hear the angels sing![231]

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[230] cf. King Lemuel's mother in Proverbs 30 and the godly wife of Proverbs 31.

[231] Edmund H. Sears, 'It Came Upon a Midnight Clear,'
https://hymnary.org/text/it_came_upon_the_midnight_clear.

Perhaps it is time for the messages of *Joy to the World*[232] and *I heard the bells on Christmas Day*[233] to be heard *through* those who are silenced by the politics and theology of male exclusive power and privilege as well as *for* them. Perhaps banning women's voices from elderships and pulpits, and thus minimising their presence in seminaries and theological colleges, marginalises some of the very voices that urgently need hearing not only in churches and related groups, but among those people Paul had in mind when he preached at Athens (Acts 17:15–34).

Perhaps the Christ of whom the angels sang declares his cross ends the gender war and brings a new era, not just for individuals, but for all humanity by overcoming social and economic equality, racism, and gender-based biases:

> And so this is Xmas (war is over)
> For weak and for strong (if you want it)
> For rich and the poor ones (war is over)
> The world is so wrong (if you want it)
> And so happy Xmas (war is over)
> For black and for white (if you want it)
> For yellow and red ones (war is over)
> Let's stop all the fight (now)[234]

It is, however, hard to see gender wars ever ending when dominant male voices ignore redeeming, incarnate and sacramental humility and demand silent capitulation from all women, expecting them to behave as a subordinated human subset, along with seemingly insubordinate men who question male-only ministry and eldership. It is hard to hear voices of freedom and life when women are viewed as fundamentally forbidden, alien and strange for speaking of their suffering at the hands of leaders who have violated their dignity and decency. It is hard to bring reconciliation when one party is expected to present its case to, and accept the verdict of, those aligned by gender with alleged perpetrators. Problems are not solved by the violated and vulnerable being told simply to embrace offenders without any alteration in the power dynamics and in the absence of any accountability for inappropriate and unwelcome actions.

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[232] Isaac Watts, 'Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come!,' https://hymnary.org/text/joy_to_the_world_the_lord_is_come.

[233] Henry W. Longfellow, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day* (https://hymnary.org/text/i_heard_the_bells_on_christmas_day, 1864).

[234] John Lennon, http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/johnlennon/happyxmaswarisover.html.

Rethinking inclusion and hierarchies

While my focus has been on gender, issues relating to race, class, economics and religion have many common concerns. Attempting to isolate a 'pure' gospel from these realities leaves 'application' to individuals and external groups. It suggests that changes to the cultural status quo are either unnecessary or that pragmatic social and political alignments are needed to reinforce boundary conditions.

I covered a range of resources in *Reflections on a personal journey*. I add here some brief insights from a web site and several books. Further explorations about inclusion and hierarchies for these and other authors are readily available.

Margaret Mowczko: *Exploring the Biblical Theology of Christian Egalitarianism*[235]

I have found Mowczko's 'articles about the mutuality and equality of men and women in Christian marriage and ministry, plus Bible studies and articles about our new life in Jesus' to be precise, clearly written and carefully researched. They also often include references to other suitable literature as well as being sensitive to ways in which a variety of readers might relate to them.

Mowczko provides many detailed insights into what Stackhouse calls 'control texts'.[236] Her work challenges many of the core assumptions that are evident in self-titled complementarian views by sharing research relating to the texts and historical and cultural settings.

Scot McKnight: *Junia Is Not Alone, Reading Romans Backwards* and *The Blue Parakeet*[237]

McKnight's *Junia Is Not Alone* provides a comprehensive refutation that Junia was a man. Before considering Junia, he asks why there is so much silence about women in the Bible, 'including Miriam, the prophetic national music director, or Esther, the dancing queen, or Phoebe, the benefactor of Paul's missions, or Priscilla, the teacher'?

Paul mentioned Junia and her husband, Andronicus, once, and referred to them as apostles (Romans 16:7). McKnight reasons that Paul had no trouble using this terminology as Junia was not alone among significant women in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Christian communities of his era.

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[235] Mowczko, 'Marg Mowczko: Exploring the Biblical Theology of Christian Egalitarianism'.

[236] Stackhouse Jr., *Partners in Christ*, 37.

[237] McKnight, *Junia Is Not Alone*; *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2019); *Blue Parakeet, The: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*.

After summarising the way translators have referred to Junia, McKnight states that she was an innocent woman who had been silenced into non-existence – and that she was not alone in Christian history, including in our own lifetimes.

McKnight picks up on Phoebe in *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire.*[238] He contrasts the profiling of Paul as a patriarchal male with his assignment of Phoebe to the task of taking *and* delivering his letter to the numerous house churches in Rome. At least the first, if not all the communities which first heard the book of Romans and had questions about it answered, heard it from and had it explained by Phoebe. Paul called her a sister, using his 'favourite metaphor [of siblings] for Christians'.

Paul's use of siblings contrasted the pathways to glory and fame in Roman societies, as did his reference to her as a deacon or servant – aligning her with himself, his associates, and Jesus. Her servant-ministry was evident in her generosity and most likely in her hospitality, leadership and patronage of a house-church in Cenchreae.

After discussing those mentioned in Romans 16, and noting the number of women in the list, McKnight concludes that these Roman house churches were characterised by diversity. Paul, McKnight reasons, sought unity in this diversity using the notion of sibling relationships in Christ – relationships that 'transcended and affirmed one's ethnicity, gender, and status'.

McKnight develops his thoughts about *The Bible and Women* in part 4 of *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible.* He outlines three views about women – those of hard and soft patriarchy and mutualism – before identifying what are often seen as key texts and addressing what women are recorded as doing in the Bible. His mention of women in the New Testament includes Jesus' mother as well as those profiled in his books just mentioned.

He then looks at 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 in the context of Peter's quote about prophesying in Acts 2. His conclusion is that the biblical plot and story indicate 'an increased expansion of women in church ministries'. He states that where restrictions previously existed because of respectability, women's ministries should not now be limited as they were in the first century. McKnight sees 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 as 'creative, liberating, and forward-looking' and affirmative of his reasoning.[239]

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[238] *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire*, chapters one and two.

[239] *Blue Parakeet, The: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*, 204, 205.

John Stackhouse: *Partners in Christ*[240]

Having outlined his hermeneutical method, Stackhouse looks at several of the limitations and anomalies that face egalitarians and complementarians. Complementarians need to reflect on the way many passages profile barriers between men and women being removed and spiritual gifts and callings being distributed without gender discrimination. Egalitarians, he contends, need to consider the patriarchal pattern throughout most of the Bible, the non-equal marriage relationship of God and Israel and of Christ and the church, Jesus' exclusion of women from his twelve chosen disciples, and Paul's apparent silencing of at least some women in some churches.

Following his intention to develop the paradigm he outlined in the first five chapters, he identifies equality as his primary principle and prospering the gospel message as the most significant ministry activity. Since God works within personal and community limits, God accommodates to human situations to achieve God's outcomes. While the reign of God is active throughout human history, it is not ever fully present. Questions about gender are therefore secondary to those concerning God's reign, even though being free from oppression and patriarchal domination are essential parts of Christ's victory.

Stackhouse then considers what he describes as the intertwining principles of gifts, calling, order and edification. While he sees evidence of patriarchal hierarchies in the New Testament, he views them in terms of accommodation not agreement. He follows Paul in discussing families and slavery together and concludes that Christians are to ameliorate these forms of domination as best they can in the hope and expectation of future freedoms.

We are then introduced to the concept of doubleness which he defines as 'the irrefutable call to conform to patriarchy combined with an incipient egalitarianism'.[241] He claims that 'the complementarian position has become incoherent'.[242] Stackhouse proceeds to re-affirm that no paradigm is perfect, to ask what should follow in practice and to examine various counterarguments.

Theological counterarguments include

- that trinitarian relations show the way men and women should treat each other. He concludes that first century cultural patriarchal patterns are not eternal ones and that parallels between trinitarian relations and human relationships are inadequate at best. He also highlights the sense of mystery involved in trinitarian understandings and the potential to use it to manipulate people into particular points of view.

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[240] Stackhouse Jr., *Partners in Christ*.

[241] Ibid., 84.

[242] Ibid., 89.

- that marriage relationships are to align with God's relationship with Israel and Christ's with the church. He believes God's transcendence and care have been communicated primarily using male language as that correlated well with ancient cultures. While the richness of these descriptions is worth preserving, their meaning in different contexts creates new opportunities for further theological insights.

- that only men should be pastors, priests and ministers. He reasons that leadership should be by a group of diverse leaders rather than a solitary man, especially given the benefits that come from women in leadership.

After considering several counterarguments from church history and contemporary situations, Stackhouse identifies activism, realism, vocation and hope as guiding principles before addressing inclusive language. He states that translations have weaknesses and errors, that they are approximations, that languages are fluid and not static in conveying meaning and that the impact of language can be overemphasised.

He concludes by discussing the benefits that come when women participate in theological and church settings before making some comparison to the insensitivities of those who discriminate on racial, social or economic grounds. Men, he argues,

> need to hear from women about what it's like to be demeaned, disrespected, or dismissed. … We need this powerful impetus to compel us to undergo the strain of actually changing our hearts and minds. Otherwise, we naturally will stay where we are, in the convenient and comfortable paradigms we have inherited.[243]

Stackhouse concludes by saying that men must provide safe situations where women are able to share the difficult realities that they face by being discriminated against and silenced. He quotes James 1:22–25 in pointing out that if men then hear these painful truths and fail to act, those whom they have heard are doubly victimised and the men involved are doubly guilty.

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[243] Ibid., 174.

Kevin Giles: *Jesus and Women; Jesus' Affirmation of Women;* **and** *What the Bible Actually Teaches about Women*[244]

Jesus and Women[245]

A 1976 article on *Jesus and Women* by Kevin Giles identified women's ministry as a significant issue. Giles focused on Jesus rather than Paul, while noting that women were 'second rate citizens in first century Judaism'.[246] Giles argued that Jesus treated women as equals, especially regarding their callings and vocations in the reign of God. Luke, according to Giles, emphasises this priority by identifying at least thirteen more women than the other Gospel authors and gives women prominent places in his Gospel.

Giles concluded his article by claiming that the welfare of women concerned Jesus and that the Gospel authors were writing 'far more than beautiful stories about a noble social reformer'. Jesus, Giles insisted, was 'theologically motivated' in giving women 'the dignity, equality and responsibility Eve once knew in the Garden of Eden'. Jesus was disrupting sinful forces and annulling 'man-made discrimination on the basis of sex or race'.[247]

Jesus' Affirmation of Women[248]

Giles begins his presentation by insisting that good theology is more than reading the Bible through the lens of a complex comment in 1 Timothy 2:11–14. His view is that Jesus' teaching deserves precedence as we, including Paul, are his disciples.

Giles notes that New Testament teaching comes to us with the writers' cultural settings rather than our contemporary contexts. Jesus, he argues, built on and developed the best views of women available to him. He generated new views of women by subverting rather than attacking the assumptions of those who had influence. In doing this, Jesus was not profiling the way churches should be organised in the future. This framework means that there are many contemporary concerns that the New Testament does not readily answer or even consider.

This subversive process identifies Jesus as a change-agent, especially about hierarchical leadership and authority, something Giles claims was 'so revolutionary that 2000 years later most of [Jesus'] disciples still cannot comprehend it'. This lack of understanding amounts to disobedience when it involves pronouncements about male privilege and authority over women. Jesus' teaching, according to

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[244] Kevin N. Giles, 'Jesus and Women,' *Interchange* 19 (1976): 131–36; *Jesus' Affirmation of Women* (Christians for Biblical Equality, 2010); *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*. Cf. *Trinity & Subordinationism, The: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate.*

[245] 'Jesus and Women.'

[246] Ibid., 131.

[247] Ibid., 136.

[248] Giles, *Jesus' Affirmation of Women.*

Giles, was about sharing leadership and defining it in terms of 'costly service'.[249] The same pattern emerges in Jesus' comments about families where priority is given to doing God's will and not to gender specific roles.

Jesus also subverted purity laws, male-centred beliefs about marriage and divorce, customs privileging men using male-female social norms, Jewish laws about circumcision (which he replaced with baptisms open to men and women), and practices that assumed women could not be reliable witnesses.

Giles then rejects claims that Jesus' choice of twelve male apostles implies he affirmed male headship. Giles bases this rejection on his assessment that Jesus never subordinated women and never spoke about male-only leadership. Giles rejects views that cultural expectations about travel, leadership and testifying were barriers to women being apostles since women accompanied Jesus, provided leadership and were witnesses to Jesus (including to his death and resurrection). The New Testament describes two kinds of apostles: those who were initial witnesses to Jesus' ministry and those who were apostles in the context of the early church mission.

After exploring some of the ways in which each Gospel considers women, Giles concludes that Jesus was subverting his cultural context about women by affirming them and by not decreeing separate roles for them. The Gospels lack any suggestion that men were meant to have authority over women in the home or the church 'let alone that this ordering was a creation given'.[250] The leadership of which Jesus spoke involved service not domination, and women and men are both to serve in homes and churches.

What the Bible Actually Teaches about Women[251]

Giles outlines aspects of his contribution to debates about biblical teaching regarding women. He claims his focus is on the half of humanity who are categorised as subordinated to men rather than on women wanting to be ordained. He sees this subordination in similar terms to those previously used to justify slavery or apartheid.

Giles says he writes because the biblical gospel sets people free and lifts up the lowly, because complementarian interpretations are not the only ones, because they involve powerful men demeaning women and because they make claims about other people that are not true.

Giles defines complementarian theology as a biblical reading that makes claims about 'creation-given subordination of women' and male headship. These claims

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[249] Ibid.

[250] Ibid.

[251] Giles, *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*.

are based on Genesis 3:16, 1 Corinthians 11:3, 14:34, Ephesians 5:22–24 and 1 Timothy 2:12. He distinguishes between exegesis, biblical theology and theology which contexts Scripture in the contemporary ethos.[252]

Good theology for Giles accurately reflects biblical texts, explains ways to read them, draws legitimate inferences, clarifies issues, communicates truth, has good outcomes, is aligned with past theologies and makes sense of the world. He sees complementarian theology as obfuscating language about headship and roles, ignoring counter evidence and viewpoints, confusing facts and inferences, misunderstanding prophecy, making hermeneutical errors and misconstruing authority as creationally privileged power over other people.

Giles presents his version of the rise of and crisis for complementarianism, especially following the 1991 publication of the Danvers Statement. He outlines events in 2016 where some complementarian leaders realised that teaching the eternal subordination of the Son amounted to Arianism. This crisis worsened when cases emerged of abusive and controlling behaviour by conservative evangelical leaders. Nonetheless, since complementarianism is primarily about male privilege and power, Giles sees little immediate change in behaviour among leaders aligned with these beliefs.

He then explains why he sees this debate about women emerging at this time and why evangelical leadership has not continued to support women wanting to be Christian leaders within families, churches and society in general. He emphasises that changes in understanding Scripture are about interpretation and do not involve rejecting authentic biblical teaching.

Giles uses an addendum to chapter 3 to outline the way language about *roles* emerged among complementarians in the late 1970s as a mean of avoiding references to men as superior and women as inferior, along with the introduction in the early 1990s of the word *complementarian* to mask ideas of subordination. He explains that roles in normal usage are behaviours which relate to ordinary actions rather than to ontological power-based relationships, as complementarians claim. This 'insidious use' of role language is 'person-defining' and functions in similar ways to the role terminology 'found in classic aristocracy, the Hindu caste system, race-based slavery, and in apartheid'.[253]

Giles sees this creation-based, Trinity-sourced subordination approach as contrary to Christian creeds and readily leading to the abuse of women.[254] He concludes

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[252] Ibid., chapter 1.

[253] Ibid., chapter 3.

[254] Cf. Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity*; *Better Together: Equality in Christ*; *Rise and Fall of the Complementarian Doctrine of the Trinity, The*; *Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related in Any Way?, The*.

What the Bible Actually Teaches about Women by considering what is involved in changing one's mind and what he hopes should occur in the future.

He believes complementarians say they cannot change because that would involve abandoning biblical authority. He rejects this claim because of his experiences of complementarians refusing to engage in open debate. Another reason involves complementarians believing that changing their views means denying male-female differentiation. He sees them locked into an inability to see male-female differentiation as biological rather than hierarchical.

Giles identifies two less appealing reasons as being linked with men believing they will lose power, including in theological and ministry contexts. He is also aware that some women gain accolades from associating with these views.

He believes evangelical egalitarians should publicly refute false claims about their views of biblical authority and male-female differentiation, that they should continue to refine and communicate their biblical reasons for believing that gender equality is 'the God-given ideal', that complementarians might realise that their 'teaching can have awful consequences for women', that egalitarian men might be brave enough to speak against complementarianism, that some complementarian leaders might realise their faulty logic, and that evangelical egalitarians need to emphasise 'that Jesus opposes all claims that some should rule over other in the church and the home'.[255]

Marianne Meye Thompson: *The Promise of the Father*[256]

Introduction

Thompson introduces her book by referring to feminist diversity as reformist, revolutionary or rejectionist. These views either state that other images than Father are needed alongside Father, claim that Father is so enmeshed with patriarchal structures that a different form of Christianity is required, or insist it is indicative of a system that is best discarded as it establishes an equivalence between masculinity and divinity.

Theological responses to feminist approaches vary from being sympathetic to disapproving. Rejecting feminist views often involves preferencing Father over Mother as a descriptor of God by distinguishing between similes, metaphors and analogies. Jesus' use of Father when addressing God is similarly seen as affirming that God's biblical name *is* Father and that *this* name must be maintained.

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[255] *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*, Conclusion.

[256] Marianne Meye Thompson, *Promise of the Father, The* (Louisville, Kentucky, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

While these responses may reinforce feminist views against Christianity, they may alternatively lead to an awareness that Jesus' use of Father involved a questioning of the prevailing patriarchal religious, political and social order.

Thompson considers the extent to which Jesus' naming of God as *abba* advanced contemporary Jewish beliefs about God and the level to which it correlated with these understandings. Both alternatives base early Christian beliefs about God as Father on the history and person of Jesus.

She indicates that references to God as Father were not inventions by Jesus or the early church since they exist in the Old Testament and Jewish texts. Human fathers were described in these contexts as community and family leaders who generated life and provided inheritances, who loved and cared for their children, and who were honourable authority figures that were worth obeying. Jesus and New Testament authors used Father for God in these three ways.

Thompson reasons that Jesus was not primarily identifying his own experience of God as Father but was emphasising his conviction that Israel's God would renew and restore God's people. She believes that while describing God as Father was more in continuity than discontinuity, Jesus used Father to profile his identity, to highlight the vocation of the community he was forming, and to emphasise his community's relationship with Israel's renewal and beyond his national context.

Biblical descriptions of God as Father, according to Thompson, do not involve any kind of ontological gender, including any type of essential masculinity in God. God's fatherhood is not simply a 'model for the conduct of human fathers or men'. It rather provided a whole faith community focus that prioritised 'mercy, justice, and humility' as their obedient response to God.

Thompson states that while the biblical writers call on people to know God as Father, this confession is a 'confession of God's redemptive and faithful love for his people' and more than an inner experience or attitude.[257]

She emphasises that confessional claims about believing in God the Father as Almighty and Creator are not to be first understood as defining Christianity but rather to be considered as arising and resulting from God's relationship with Israel, Jesus and the early Christian communities.

Conclusion

Eschatology, particularity, anthropology, experience and names and metaphors

Thompson begins with this last point, preferring an eschatological to a creedal trajectory. Her eschatological trajectory begins with the Old Testament and anticipates Father-God's ultimate realisation of his purposes through the re-affirmation and fulfilment of his covenant promises. As creedal trajectories begin

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[257] Ibid., 19.

in the New Testament and climax in the formation of the creeds, they need to be accommodated within an eschatological trajectory which starts in the Hebrew tradition and culminates in the realisation of God's reign. She hopes that this broader trajectory will enable fruitful understandings of God's fatherhood to emerge that will enrich and refresh Christian communities.

Thompson states that this eschatological trajectory included personal and community strands about God's fatherhood in Second Temple Judaism and the Old Testament. The New Testament documents describe God as both Jesus' Father and as Father of the community of the faithful. It widens the community to include Gentiles in Christ as Abraham's descendants.

Thompson indicates that biblical usage of Father excludes explicitly validating masculine identity or just teaching men about being fathers. Ethical lessons are for whole communities rather than specifically for men. Biblical references to fathers do not 'image God more fully or completely than mothers do simply by virtue of being male or being a father to one's children'.[258]

Speaking of God as Father raises questions about anthropomorphisms and analogies which remind Thompson of the provisional nature with which 1 Corinthians 13 ends and which 1 John 3:1–3 profiles.

In discussing Paul's use of *abba* to describe believers' experiences of God as Father and Jesus' use of *abba*, Thompson sees the central issue as not whether God can be experienced as *abba* but whether he can be relied on to fulfill his promises. This emphasis helps highlight the validity of the eschatological trajectory and the core need to focus on the ways in which God relates to communities of faith in every generation and situation. Attention to the biblical narrative and to the content of the Lord's prayer provides a richer context in which God as Father can be known rather than one where experience is simply disregarded or dismissed.

Thompson contexts questions about whether Father is a biblical name for God or a metaphor for God and whether it is a name that is unique to Christianity by discussing the fact that God's name was only spoken by the high priest on the day of atonement. She thinks that New Testament usage points to Father being like LORD in the Old Testament and notes that God never names himself as Father in the Old Testament.

God and gender

Thompson nominates issues concerning 'a God without gender … who is neither male nor female, nether "he" nor "she" [nor] "it"'.[259] She asks whether using both masculine and feminine language about God better communicates biblical

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[258] Ibid., 170.

[259] Ibid., 178.

understandings regarding God's relationship with Israel and the world, especially when masculine language is used to represent God's otherness, transcendence, distinctness and separation and feminine language is used to depict God's immanence and closeness in ways that can suggest pantheism.

Thompson argues that maternal biblical metaphors about God focus on the same qualities as paternal ones, namely faithfulness, trust and sustenance. Furthermore, she believes that separateness is never the primary issue when the Bible calls God Father since both father-child and mother-child descriptions preserve a sense of distinction between God and humanity. God's fatherhood primarily relates to salvation, nurture and welfare rather than to initial acts of creation. She quotes Brueggemann's assertion that biblical faith is not interested in God's sexuality or asexuality but in God's ongoing covenant relationship with God's people.

Framing questions about the language used to describe God leads her to review options theologians adopt to address issues relating to God and gender.

• Using only masculine terminology for God assigns a meta-masculine character to God which preferences fathers and sons while rejecting feminine or maternal imagery for God. Those who hold these views accept that God is not male but insist on using 'he' and so imply God has gender. Using the mainly masculine imagery in the Bible comes close to rejecting what it claims to preserve.

• Using feminine and maternal terminology for God leads to complexities when God is sometimes described as feminine (seen in terms of being caring, nurturing, gentleness, and tenderness) and sometimes depicted as masculine (seen in terms of being strong and authoritative). This is suspiciously like claiming that God is more – and normally – male, rather than female, as a balancing consideration. Gender, though, has 'no fixed reference point' involving 'a set of transcultural norms'.[260]

• Using gendered language for triune persons, typically by calling the Holy Spirit feminine, involves the 'ontologization of gender' in God.[261]

• Maintaining equivalence of terminology for *all* triune persons ends up portraying God as being of dual or composite gender.

• Describing God as of *one* gender should be resisted while depicting God as being without gender should evoke as 'strong a negative reaction to thinking of God as *male* as there is to thinking of God *female*'.[262]

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[260] Ibid., 180.

[261] Ibid., 181.

[262] Ibid., 182.

Clarity is needed about God *not* being masculine because Jesus was a man. God, according to Thompson, is not explicitly profiled as a masculine father model compared to women since God's fatherhood is always relevant to whole communities. She cites Miroslav Volf:

> … One can learn from God the Father no more about what it means to be a human father than one can learn about what it means to be a human mother; inversely, one can learn from God the Mother no more about what it means to be a human mother than one can learn about what it means to be a human father. …

> The ontologization of gender would ill serve both the notion of God and the understanding of gender. Nothing in God is specifically feminine; nothing in God is specifically masculine.[263]

• Using no male terminologies about God as Father as 'they promote hierarchical notions of God's authority and, by extension, also of human authority, which always threaten to deteriorate into authoritarianism'.[264]

Thompson believes that while references to God as Father link with God's authority, God's fatherly authority evokes 'obedience and honour' and 'is not subsequently transferred to or vested in certain individuals' in the Bible.

> God does not stand at the top of human hierarchies of power and authority but, rather, exists outside them, calling them all into question and subverting human standards of honour and power that place those with the greatest claims of status at the top and those with the fewest such claims at the bottom.[265]

Jesus and God: The Promise of 'Our Father'

God's authority as Father refers to 'a relationship of trust and to the promise of faithfulness' in the context of God as Father being 'the source and giver of life for the world'. New Testament usage defines God as Father in terms of Jesus calling God '*Abba,* Father.' This definition needs to be given 'texture and shape' by understanding 'mercy, love, and redemption'. Thompson believes 'the church's witness is not that it is "meaningful" to speak of God as the Father of Jesus Christ, but that it is true'. God's Fatherhood 'can be unpacked specifically in terms of his relationship to the Son' in the wider context of God's prior relationship to Israel and God's promises to be faithful and to fulfil God's promises.[266]

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[263] Ibid., 182. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, USA: Abingdon Press, 2019), 171–73.

[264] Thompson, *Promise of the Father, The*, 182.

[265] Ibid., 183.

[266] Ibid., 183–185.

Cynthia Long Westfall: *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*[267]

Preface

After outlining five guidelines for theological interpretation, Westfall states that studies on Paul and gender usually focus on women's roles when Pauline passages on women 'cannot be adequately understood or applied apart from a corresponding understanding of the Pauline passages on men'.[268] Her view is that these understandings must make sense of the entirety of Paul's theology rather than profiling selected verses or passages.

Westfall's stated aims were to

- engage in a biblical examination of important gender issues.

- use perspectives from modern linguistics to consider these concerns.

- be clear and convinced when interpreting and applying relevant texts.

- assist people in the next generation concerned about these issues.

She hoped her research would help

- people be more aware of differences between the text and interpretation.

- those with high views of Scripture gain fresh perspectives.

- those with alternative views be better informed about understandings that differ from their own.

- Christians serve based on gifting rather than status, race or gender.

Introduction

Westfall intends that her book provides fresh frameworks for gender issues within a coherent and consistent interpretation of Pauline theology and that these perspectives are not to be seen through lenses provided by the Greek philosophical thought that developed in the early church later than Paul.

She believes traditional interpretations of selected Pauline passages are derived from imposed preconceptions which then, in a circular process, generate outcomes aligned with these original assumptions. Her view that Paul critiques and subverts rather than accepts and adopts the dominant Greco-Roman cultural worldview is central to her emphases and adds that her book 'suggests that traditional readings confuse Paul's theology with his missional adaptation to the cultural gender

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[267] Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*.

[268] Ibid., Preface. Her guidelines are, briefly, faithfulness to Pauline literature, aligned with Paul's life, and sensible about and sensitive to textual contexts, Pauline theology and contemporary situations.

practices' and that his strategies allowed the church to reach, survive and thrive within Greco-Roman culture.[269]

Westfall identifies inconsistent interpretation methodologies as a significant concern regarding the ways passages about gender have been traditionally understood. She believes these approaches use assumptions that inevitably determine their results.

She secondly states that they do not provide coherent understandings of Paul's letters and that they are used by male leaders to maintain their dominating positions of privileged power over women in churches, homes and academic institutions. This process can result in leaders criticising those who reject their interpretations as also denying biblical teaching, a process which contradicts New Testament teaching on power and authority.

Westfall then points out that these traditional perspectives have until the last few decades assumed that women are ontologically inferior to men and that this assumption cannot be lightly discarded when considering these views. The consequences of this reality are significant as those who claim their views agree with traditional ones therefore align themselves with these assumptions.

A fourth factor relates to the way interpretation is affected by an interpreter's own personal and social context and their views concerning diversity and gifts. These cultural factors are significant for her as cultures that exclude women from exploring and explaining texts to men as well as women prohibit women from 'the interpretation of their own mail'.[270] By contrast, passages specifically addressed to men may not be considered in this way.

Conclusion

Westfall concludes her book calling 'for a thorough rereading of the Pauline passages on gender'. She states that traditional readings fail at literary level, in their interaction with original contexts and by not adequately resolving interpretive difficulties. These factors worsen the issues they should be helping settle and increase inconsistencies with democratic cultures.

Her view is that the level of alignment between biblical beliefs and views that 'male and female are ontologically equal' requires re-reading texts with similar levels of 'seriousness and attention' to when trinitarian and incarnational issues were debated and resolved.

This venture should require hermeneutical consistency in studying biblical gender passages regarding men as well as women. It should submit traditional understandings to the same level of rigour as is normally applied to any significant

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[269] Ibid., 3.

[270] Ibid., 5.

interpretative option. It should also ensure any Pauline theology of gender is developed in relationship with other Pauline theologies including

> the doctrine of salvation by grace, so crucial for the gentile mission [and] the Pauline theology of authority and power [since claims] to authority and power based on gender run counter to both Paul's teaching and his model for leadership.[271]

A further stated concern is that interpretive conclusions need to be evaluated by the outcomes that result from them. These include the extent to which women who are subordinated by men in authority live in environments where a lack of leadership accountability readily results in unacceptable treatment of women. The ability of Christians and churches to engage with contemporary society is also compromised by poor gender theologies.

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[271] Ibid., 314.

Community and Ministry

Reflections on a personal journey

Determining community and understanding leadership

I have wondered about the wisdom of placing framed photos of ministers in the vestries of some of the churches I have visited. A similar practice is used for political leaders in parliamentary settings. Hebrews 2:13 describes a different perspective. We do not read of a solo Jesus but of him declaring 'Here am I *and the children* whom God has given me' (italics added). Privileged men (yes, males), usually dog-collared or robed are highlighted as the dominant figures in the history of local churches and done so when it is the local community who are the church!

I am reminded of Jesus' words to his disciples about power and authority – words which commented on the religious and political systems of his era. Jesus was not only talking to his *followers*; his words were for *leaders*:

> You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:42–44).

The following frameworks were prepared in the hope that approaches to leadership may be enriched by reflective and intentional action. I have found them helpful in reflecting on my own life as well as in calibrating my involvement in vocational and community organisations. I hope that they may assist other people and groups in their personal, vocational and recreational activities. I have not attempted to provide theological or educational rationales for them.

These frameworks provide opportunities for strengths-based leadership. Processes such as those suggested by these frameworks are best used in positive activities rather than in negative and self-weakening ways. Acceptance of one's situation does not mean accommodation of, or acquiescence to, unwelcome behaviours. There is a difference between acknowledging past and present realities and agreeing with their validity. Sensible acceptance of past experiences can help strategic and intentional growth.

When leaders adopt strategies that people in their communities find inappropriate, questions of risk management and dispute resolution arise. The ways in which leaders and communities handle the dilemmas and conflicts that occur may determine the ongoing viability and vibrancy of these communities.

Considering these difficulties and the processes used by leaders, external support and mediation may be needed if transparency, truth and trust are to be front and centre. My experience and the sharing of other people with me indicates that laypeople are too often marginalised and excluded by processes that lack

procedural fairness, occur in secret and are communicated using vague generalities, ambiguous euphemisms and destructive innuendos.

Professional standards may be reduced to one axiom: the ordained minister, ordained priest or licensed pastor must *never* be criticised, regardless of what they do or say. Any failure by them that is commented on may be inverted into some form of criticism of the person affected and lead to that person leaving the community without anything being resolved, with their character demeaned and defamed, and their involvement, identity and integrity dismantled and denigrated.

The readings and reflections profiled may help those who have experienced or are experiencing toxic, trauma inducing situations. These notes are not intended to provide therapy or counselling – they simply share some of my own learning. I have found that accessing professional expertise outside of difficult situations is a key priority when in unresolved contexts.

Those under question about their use of power may present themselves as best placed to deal with any problems that arise concerning themselves. By proposing this strategy, they may well be wanting to maintain dominance, silence criticism and manipulate those affected by their alleged unwelcome behaviours. By contrast, insights to authentic leadership and flourishing communities can help people recover their confidence and improve their well-being. Clear expectations can help identify concerns about unwelcome behaviours and grow confidence in setting suitable boundaries when in group contexts.

Snapshots of some significant themes

Martin Luther King Jr.: *Letter from Birmingham Jail*[272]

King's letter was replying to being told that his activities were 'unwise and untimely'. King's response to this was that

> We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

He identified 'four basic steps' in any nonviolent campaign: 'collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action'. He believed that 'Negro (*sic*) leaders [had] sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the political leaders [had] consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation'.

In replying to questions relating to 'sit-ins, marches, and so forth', he agreed that while negotiation was preferable and while he had 'earnestly worked and preached against violent tension', that there 'is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth'. Without this tension, people would not 'rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal'. He asserted that nonviolent tension would help people ascend 'from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood'.

King saw history as 'the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily' and said he had learned 'through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed'. He wrote that the word 'wait' has almost always meant 'never' and aligned himself with the view that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied'.

King argued that 'segregation statutes' are unjust since they degrade people, distort 'the soul' and damage 'human personality'. They give 'the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority' and so are 'morally wrong and sinful'.

He outlined 'two honest confessions':

> First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's (*sic*) great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace

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[272] Martin Luther King Jnr, 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail,' https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail.

which is the presence of justice. … Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

King notes that those who complained that his actions might 'precipitate violence' were, by implication, 'condemning Jesus because His unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to His will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion'. King believed that time could be used 'destructively or constructively', and that his generation will have to repent 'not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people'. Human progress, King wrote, 'never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men [and women] willing to be co-workers with God'.

In response to those who saw his 'activity in Birmingham as extreme', King believed that 'Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The urge for freedom will eventually come'. He had hoped

that the white moderate would see this. Maybe I was too optimistic. Maybe I expected too much. I guess I should have realized that few members of a race that has oppressed another race can understand or appreciate the deep groans and passionate yearnings of those that have been oppressed, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action.

He declared his 'disappointment' with much of 'the white church and its leadership'. While claiming he was not a negative critic and would 'remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen',

In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro (*sic*), I have watched white churches stand on the sidelines and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, … I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion which made a strange distinction between bodies and souls, the sacred and the secular. …

The contemporary church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's often vocal sanction of things as they are.

King concludes with a plea for forgiveness should he have understated or overstated the truth or been unreasonably impatient.

Immanuel Kant: *What is enlightenment?*[273]

The Age of Reason and its enlightenment philosophy, with their focus on human understanding of natural and moral law challenges theological and ecclesiastical worldviews. It also challenges racial and gender discriminatory practices in our own generation.

Kant understood enlightenment as moving from 'nonage', or immaturity, to maturity, as emerging from comfort and indolence to the freedom of thinking independently. He believed that an informed maturity could be achieved by discarding 'the yoke of nonage' and thinking for oneself. He wrote against those who presumed to

> see to it that the overwhelming majority of humanity – among them the entire female sex – should consider the step to maturity, not only as hard, but as extremely dangerous.

He declared that once people overcame this perilous yoke, they would 'spread about them the spirit of a reasonable appreciation of every one's value and of their duty to think for themselves'.

Enlightenment, for Kant, meant providing freedom by removing limitations to think and reason. Authoritarian decrees, by contrast, hinder liberty, harm people, hamper social and cultural development and require empty obedience and forceful coercion:

> Now I hear the cry from all sides: 'Do not argue!' The officer says: 'Do not argue – drill!' The tax collector: 'Do not argue – pay!' The pastor: 'Do not argue – believe!' Only one ruler in the world says: 'Argue as much as you please, but obey!' We find restrictions on freedom everywhere. But which restriction is harmful to enlightenment? Which restriction is innocent, and which advances enlightenment? I reply: the public use of one's reason must be free at all times, and this alone can bring enlightenment to humanity. …

One main point in Kant's view of the enlightenment concerned religion. He saw 'nonage in religion [as] not only the most harmful but the most dishonourable':

> … to agree to a perpetual religious constitution which is not publicly questioned by anyone would be, as it were, to annihilate a period of time in the progress of man's improvement. This must be absolutely forbidden.

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[273] Immanuel Kant, 'What Is Enlightenment?,' http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html.

George Orwell: *1984*[274]

> The Ministry of Truth [concerned itself with news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts. It] was an enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete, soaring up, terrace after terrace. … From where Winston stood it was just possible to read … the three slogans of the Party:

> <p align="center">WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH</p>

> … The Ministry of Peace …concerned itself with war. And the Ministry of Plenty … was responsible for economic affairs. … The Ministry of Love [maintained law and order. It] was the really frightening one. There were no windows in it at all. …

> The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command. His heart sank as he thought of the enormous power arrayed against him, the ease with which any Party intellectual would overthrow him in debate, the subtle arguments which he would not be able to understand, much less answer. And yet he was in the right! They were wrong and he was right. The obvious, the silly, and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold on to that! The solid world exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth's centre. With the feeling that … he was setting forth an important axiom, he wrote:

> > *Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows.*

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[274] George Orwell, *1984* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1949), Part One, Section 1, 7 and Part One, Section 7, 68.

René Girard: *I See Satan fall like lightning*[275]

There can be few more basic issues facing humanity than violence. Girard believes the rivalry for possessions that results from desire is integral to human sociality, and hence the need for prohibitions to help prevent the inevitable 'reciprocal escalation and one-upmanship'.[276] Desiring an object involves the person who covets, the object wanted, and its owner. This 'mimetic desire' affirms the value of the object to both parties, encourages 'mimetic rivalry', and produces a mutual, possibly concealed, imitation.[277] Conflict is not unusual but is endemic and idolatrous, with rivals behaving in similar ways.

By contrast, Girard argues that Jesus wanted his followers to imitate him in imaging his Father, thus diverting these mimetic rivalries,[278] and inverting mimetic possessiveness so it mirrors divine freedom and generosity.[279] Jesus' reference to stumbling blocks, temptations or scandals,[280] highlights the self-escalating nature of mimetic rivalry, and the disastrous results of this negative imitation.[281]

Mimetic desire is seen by communities as 'intrinsically good',[282] involving both unconscious and deliberate imitation of other people's desires rather than instinctively following one's own objectives. The resultant shape of human culture which uses language to express interactions elevates human society beyond animal forms or sinks it below them. Mimesis is to be understood as 'not only the way we learn – it's also the way we fight'.[283]

Peter's denial of Jesus is an example of 'mimetic contagion',[284] where a group identifies and targets a single victim, rather than indicating a psychological weakness. A 'mimetic illusion',[285] or sense of moral superiority, makes people

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[275] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*.

[276] Ibid., 14: Girard begins with the last of the ten commandments. The previous four are the inevitable consequence when this mimetic rivalry is unrestrained: 'If we respected the tenth commandment, the four commandments that precede it would be superfluous.'

[277] Ibid., 10, 11.

[278] Ibid., 13: 'In inviting us to imitate him, he invites us to imitate his own imitation.'

[279] Ibid., 14: 'The best way of preventing violence does not consist in forbidding objects, or even rivalistic desire, as the tenth commandment does, but in offering to people the model that will protect them from mimetic rivalries rather than involving them in these rivalries.'

[280] Matthew 18:7ff.

[281] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 18: 'When the first scandal occurs, it gives birth to others, and the result is *mimetic crises*, which spread without ceasing and become worse and worse.'

[282] Ibid., 15.

[283] Cynthia Haven, 'History Is a Test. Mankind Is Failing It.,' http://alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/magazine/article/?article_id=29620.

[284] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 19.

[285] Ibid., 20.

vulnerable to repeating the mistakes of earlier generations. Girard concluded that the convergence of mimetic conflicts or scandals resulting in Jesus' death removes the need for a theological explanation of the crowd's behaviour.[286]

This convergence occurs as individual combatants focus on each other rather than on a contested object, and then, with other combatants, shift their hostility 'to another scandal whose power of mimetic attraction is superior to theirs'.[287] Understanding this process explains Paul's view of the scandal of the cross and Jesus' own declarations about his imminent crucifixion.[288] The pattern of mimetic contagion correlates with the persecution of the prophets,[289] including John the Baptist, where those involved succumbed to a collective hostility towards unacceptable targets.[290] The result of each sequence of events 'is a cyclic process of disorder and reestablishment of order that reaches its high point and ends in a mechanism of victimary unanimity'.[291] For Girard, all these mimetic cycles involving the prophets culminate in the death of Christ, through which God provides 'a new and supreme revelation'.[292]

The mimetic cycle leads to community hatred against a single victim, whose elimination is cathartic,[293] producing a brief peace before the cycle is repeated. Girard describes this process as Satan expelling Satan, where Satan is seducer and accuser.[294] Either we have Satan as our 'father',[295] where we 'descend together on the infernal spiral … of all against one' without regard for truth, or we choose a model which does not involve conflict, with 'Christ as intermediary'.[296] Underpinning theology, for Girard, is an anthropology which understands scandal in mimetic desires and parasitic Satanic activity in mimetic cycles. Girard's

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[286] Ibid., 22: 'The war of *all against all* that transforms communities into a war of *all against one* that gathers and unifies them is not limited solely to the case of Jesus.'

[287] Ibid., 23.

[288] 1 Corinthians 1:17ff; Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27; cf. Luke 20:18; John 11:52, 16:32.

[289] E.g. Matthew 11:9ff, 12:39ff, 13:14,17,35, 23:29ff; John 11:45-53, 12:38.

[290] Matthew 14:1ff; cf. Luke 7:18-33, 9:1-9.

[291] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 28: Girard uses the Servant passages from Isaiah 40ff to discuss these themes and how they lead to a '*mimetic cycle*', 30,: 'The initial proliferation of scandals leads sooner or later into an acute crisis at the climax of which unanimous violence is set off against the single victim …. This event re-establishes the former order or establishes a new one out of the old. Then the new order itself is destined someday to enter into crisis, and so on.'

[292] Ibid., 31.

[293] Ibid., 32, where Girard quotes Aristotle.

[294] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 37: 'Satan can therefore always put enough order back into the world to prevent the total destruction of what he possesses without depriving himself for too long of his favourite pastime, which is to sow disorder, violence, and misfortune among his subjects.' See also ibid., 38, where he describes 'medieval legends'.

[295] John 8:42-44; cf. 1 John 3:4-13.

[296] Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 40.

conclusion is that Christianity exposes this deceptive, delusional Satanic 'sleight of hand'.[297]

By focusing on mimetic rivalry, questions relating to the ways in which intrinsic and intentional imitation enable humanity to enhance its cultural identity and healing and enrichment, with a purifying and leavening action are also worth considering.[298] The role of hierarchical power in mimetic rivalry in identifying and targeting victims, where scapegoats[299] are the vulnerable, or of revolutionary actions where ruling persons or elites become targets, is also worth considering. Particularly helpful is Girard's discussion of the New Testament texts relating to the views of Jesus and Paul about the scandal of the cross, and Girard's observation 'that the symbolism of the traditional cross, the crossing of the two branches, renders visible the internal contradiction of the scandal'.[300] Girard's thesis enables a helpful understanding of common life situations from an anthropological perspective which affirms much of the redemptive Christian narrative.[301]

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[297] Ibid., 44.

[298] Cf. Ibid., 183.

[299] Ibid., 154-160.

[300] Ibid., 23, also 183ff: 'The Resurrection is not only a miracle, a prodigious transgression of natural laws. It is the spectacular sign of the entrance into the world of a power superior to violent contagion.'

[301] Ibid., 3: 'The opposition between the scapegoat concealed in mythology and unconcealed in Judaism and Christianity illuminates not only archaic religions, not only many neglected features of the Gospels, but above all the relationship between the two, the unique truth of the Judeo-Christian tradition.'

René Girard, 'Account of Mimetic Theory,' https://www.scribd.com/document/335097172/Account-of-Mimetic-Theory-Rene-Girard, lists his three main Mimetic Theory 'insights': … Vengeance is the first characteristically human institution. We call this first insight the *moment of mimetic desire or mimetic rivalry*. … The mimetic reciprocity of vengeance is deflected upon a single victim, which mimetically attracts all the violence to itself. This … process … means the purifications of violence through one solemn, sacrificial death. We call this second insight the moment of the *scapegoat*. Archaic religion is essentially the ritualized repetition of this sacrificial death, in order to renew is efficacy. We call this third insight the moment of *religion*. … Christianity, as atheistic anthropology correctly points out, is exactly the same schema, with one fundamental difference, systematically ignored by modern anthropology, *the attribution of guilt is reversed and the scapegoat victim is explicitly vindicated*. This is why Christianity, far from being just one more religion, reveals the lie of all religions (including itself when misunderstood).

Thomas Pietsch: *René Girard, anthropologist of the cross*[302]

Pietsch begins by raising the question as to whether biblical myths are so heavily aligned with those in other historical mythologies that they lack uniqueness and cannot be considered to be inspired. He nominates three responses. Firstly, some scholars conclude that the similarities are exaggerated. Secondly, other scholars claim that biblical myths can de differentiated because they have factual content. Pietsch includes C. S. Lewis in this group, quoting from essays 'The Grand Miracle' and 'Myth became Fact':

> What the anthropological critic of Christianity is always saying is perfectly true. Christ is a figure of that sort.

> To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths.[303]

A third approach asserts that there are significant differences between biblical narratives and traditional myths. Girard is in this group, according to Pietsch, since he interprets notions of original sin as indicating that everyone is 'afflicted by jealousy and rivalry resulting from imitative desire'.[304] Biblical mythology is unique in that it views 'mimetic rivalry' from the perspective of the victim:

> In revealing the innocence of the victim, the scriptures thus bring an end to mythology insofar as they bring an end to our self-deception that the victim is guilty, shining a light on our own violent need to scapegoat.[305]

Pietsch believes Girard understood the last two Mosaic commandments as prohibiting the desire to take a neighbour's belonging. The resulting violence and violations lead to someone being scapegoated from the community. The tragedy, according to Girard, is that the persons scapegoating believe in the nobility of their actions. Pietsch concludes that

> The pagan system of sacrifice was at an advantage in at least acknowledging the need for the sacrifice of a 'guilty' victim in order to bind the community together. One of Girard's critiques of modern society is that outside of Christianity, all people are still driven by resentment and thus need to sacrifice and scapegoat in order to foster a sense of belonging and to restore peace. It is just that our mechanisms for deceiving ourselves have improved,

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[302] Thomas Pietsch, 'René Girard, Anthropologist of the Cross,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 51:2 (2017): 119–34.

[303] Ibid., 119, 120.

[304] Ibid., 121.

[305] Ibid., 122.

so our mimetic desires and scapegoating violence are increasingly hidden from us.[306]

Pietsch, in referring to Girard's final book, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*, indicates that while mimetic violence facilitates a community's identity through its catharsis, 'the world's myths do not reveal a way to interpret the scriptures, but exactly the reverse: the scriptures reveal to us the way to interpret myth'.[307]

The Gospel-Jesus and any Christianity adequately aligned with him become solutions to violence rather than creating yet another source of it. The essence of Jesus as an innocent victim becomes a disarming rather than re-arming action replacing brutality and belligerence with blessedness and beauty.

In asking whether Girard's assessment that the Bible is "unmasking mythology and scapegoating" is novel, Pietsch reflects on Girard's comparison of Dionysus and Jesus, and his references to Nietzsche. For Girard, Jesus was an innocent victim with his murderers being guilty, while Nietzsche saw Christianity condemning the powerful and exalting the weak.

Pietsch concludes his article by considering the relationships between Girard's theological and anthropological perspectives about the atoning nature of the death of Christ. He also states that it

> is very difficult, indeed impossible, to consider all desire as mimetic (hunger and thirst come immediately to mind). Attempting to do so risks neglecting human and natural ontology altogether.[308]

Pietsch's final testimony to Girard highlights Girard's belief that 'Our mimetic interpretation is less important than [the early Christian's] faith but, if it can help our own vacillating faith a little, it is useful'.[309]

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[306] Ibid., 123.

[307] Ibid., 124.

[308] Ibid., 130.

[309] Ibid., 132.

Kevin Giles: *The headship of men and the abuse of women*[310]

Understanding domestic abuse and violence in the world and in the church

Giles argues that men committing physical or non-physical abuse are wanting to dominate their partners so they can achieve their own goals. He uses the phrase '"domestic abuse *and* violence" to name never-ending, controlling behaviour that makes a woman live in fear of her partner'. He distinguishes between situational and ongoing behaviours by which one partner, usually a man, attempts to achieve complete control over a woman.[311]

Giles profiles characteristics abusive men may exhibit, including being controlling because they claim to have superior knowledge and ethics, feeling entitled since they see themselves as natural leaders, and believing they are 'strong, independent, unemotional, logical and confident', while women are 'expressive, nurturant, weak and dependent'.

He claims abusive men may seek to isolate their partners, may demand attention, may be hostile and may insist on their own views. They may manipulate their partners, including by using sex, while attempting to create good public profiles and rationalise their actions.[312]

Abusive actions, according to Giles, may be verbal, emotional/psychological (including gaslighting), social, financial/economic, spiritual, sexual or physical.

What causes some men to abuse the woman whom they say they love?

Macro-level and micro-level explanations

Giles names macro and micro level drivers of domestic abuse and violence. Macro level drivers involve social, cultural and religious factors while micro level drivers centre on personal identities, families and relationships.

Giles believes that this multi-faceted and interactive 'ecological' explanation does not *cause* as in *makes*; but *indicates* something that 'moves someone to go in a certain direction'.[313]

Giles states that more women are abused in communities where men are privileged and told they are in charge and where women are ordered to be submissive. Giles expects increasing violence against women and greater male anxiety if these beliefs are challenged and become less dominant. He believes some men will feel threatened and may push back 'against the emancipation of women' if women act independently and are assertive.

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[310] Giles, *Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related in Any Way?, The*.

[311] Ibid., 11, 27.

[312] Ibid., 27, 28.

[313] Ibid., 31, 32.

One explanation for abusive behaviour is that abusers' brains function differently. Giles disputes this reasoning by claiming that while some men may have different brain functionality, 'most abusers seem very normal'. Other explanations about why men abuse women refer to their shame about being powerless, their inability to manage their anger, and their poorly regulated alcohol consumption.

Both macro-level and micro-level explanations affect other people, including children, who see and perhaps become involved in these abusive actions:

> For daughters, this is an awful experience that never leaves them and often crushes their sense of self-worth as a woman.[314]

Headship teaching and abuse

Giles, having written in other books about egalitarian and hierarchical views, describes several terms used by complementarians as having 'euphemistic and obfuscating wording' deliberately designed to be unoffensive.

He states that if *complementarian* means *completeness*, then this term applies to anyone who believes that male and female together 'complete what it means to be human'. He believes complementarians are better identified using words like hierarchy or patriarchy.

Even worse, according to Giles, is complementarians' insistence that they teach the sexes are equal. They claim spiritual equality before God while simultaneously excluding any significant social equality by teaching that men are to lead and women are to follow.[315]

Difference is another word used by complementarians to define men leading and women submitting. Complementarians, according to Giles, accuse egalitarian evangelicals of denying differences between men and women. He insists that evangelical egalitarians are more than capable of distinguishing between being *different* and being *identical* or the *same*.[316]

Role is used under the guise of equality to declare that men and women have different roles where men require women submit to their authority since men have leadership power over them. Giles reasons that this teaching of roles is 'profoundly discordant … offensive, demeaning, and abusive'. He states that it explains why so many people have ceased going to church and why evangelism is often unsuccessful. Giles adds that if this teaching is contrary to what the Scriptures say then those who teach it 'are being spiritually abusive'.

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[314] Ibid., 33–36.

[315] Ibid., 37.

[316] Ibid., 37.

Giles states that we should remember that 'Our Lord said not one word on male headship and wifely submission and much to the contrary'. Giles asks about the level of silence in churches regarding domestic abuse and violence, especially when evangelical ministers claim 'their aim is to preach the whole counsel of God as it is revealed in Scripture'.[317]

Rightly hearing the Bible today

After discussing the abuse of women in the developing world, Giles focuses on 'rightly hearing the Bible today'. Giles is concerned that while churches are aware about the prevalence of domestic abuse and violence, educational programs are needed and abused women need to be believed and cared for.[318]

The considerable disagreement regarding biblical teaching on man-woman relationships, according to Giles, negatively impacts women. Using the Bible to claim that men make decisions which women must accept demeans women and makes them more vulnerable to domestic abuse and violence.[319]

Giles indicates that known realities face complementarians with the difficult choice between insisting dogmatically on male headship or abandoning it.[320]

In exploring Ephesians 5:22–24, Giles mentions Dr. Broughton Knox, former Moore Theological College Principal, teaching that 'the most important context to interpret any one verse or passage in the Bible is the whole Bible.'[321]

Giles uses this 'pithy maxim' to ask about 'what the Bible says on marriage'. He concludes that there is little or no biblical support for the belief that it is God's perpetual decree that husbands are to rule their wives.[322]

Two contrasting understandings of marriage

Giles distinguishes between leaders using their power in commanding other people to obey and servants doing what they are told. Paul, Giles reasons, was asking Christian husbands to 'lay aside their power and privileges' and to 'love and serve their wives even to the point of giving their life for them'. For Giles, this Pauline teaching turns headship 'on its head'![323]

In looking at 1 Peter, Giles points out the way passages about slavery are now understood compared to the way they were used 150 years ago by 'white

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[317] Ibid., 45.

[318] Ibid., 63.

[319] Ibid., 63.

[320] Ibid., 66.

[321] Ibid., 71.

[322] Ibid., 72.

[323] Ibid., 74.

evangelical and Reformed clergy in the Old South of America'. He asks whether modern complementarians are being consistent when discussing references to marriage in this letter.[324]

After briefly discussing 1 Timothy 2, Giles highlights a 'primary hermeneutical rule' that separates biblical interpretation in its original context and in its current contemporary one.[325]

Conclusion

Giles' conclusion focuses on the crises 'pro-slavery evangelical theologians' encountered when presented with evidence about the ongoing abuse and violence experienced by slaves. The 'biblical case' for slavery collapsed as its dehumanising consequences contradicted basic truths regarding what honoured 'the God revealed in Jesus Christ and made present in power in the life of the believer through the Holy Spirit'. Enslaving God's image and likeness was recognised as unacceptable.[326]

Looking forward 150 years since slavery was abolished in the United States, Giles quotes Beth Moore's view that the Bible is used as an excuse 'for this colossal disregard and disrespect of women', when sin and ungodliness were the real reasons for women being demeaned and denigrated.[327]

Giles asserts that a similar dilemma faces the Sydney Anglican Diocese. He claims it has been unable to convince other evangelicals of their doctrines and that many in their diocese are 'pragmatically egalitarian'. He then adds that the best scholarship on domestic abuse and violence makes complementarian teaching 'the most likely predictor of this scourge'.[328]

Further, he points out that Australian society recognises and respects women in leadership, rejects these hierarchical views and thinks they make 'as much sense to most Australians as the claim the earth is flat'. Giles reasons that since male leaders reward women who defend their privileges that change would be more likely if some of these women declared that 'enough is enough'.[329]

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[324] Ibid., 78.

[325] Ibid., 82.

[326] Ibid., 88.

[327] Ibid., 89.

[328] Ibid., 91.

[329] Ibid., 91, 92.

Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer: *A Church called Tov: Forming a goodness culture that resists abuses of power and promotes healing*[330]

McKnight and Barringer outline a range of negative narratives by which ministers often respond to questions about their actions. They claim that these

> new narratives sow seeds of doubt about the veracity, stability, and motives of the accuser; seek to minimize the seriousness of the charges; suggest that innocent words or actions were misunderstood or misinterpreted; and often attempt to widen the locus of accusation.[331]

The authors believe narratives like these reflect a church's culture and contribute to the disillusionment people feel when their trust in their leaders is fractured.

McKnight and Barringer enlarge on this theme by outlining frameworks linking narratives, actions, teaching and policies that shape and articulate a congregation's culture. They affirm that cultures are '*powerful, self-perpetuating,* and *always changing*', and that they are virtually irresistible in transforming (or transmogrifying) those within their environments.[332]

They assert that

> A lack of character in leadership can destroy decades of hard work, vision, and growth – in the blink of an eye,

and that

> Toxic, flesh-driven cultures breed a lust for power, success, celebrity, control through fear, an emphasis on authority, and demands for loyalty.

While this type of leadership and its resulting culture may not be immediately or readily discerned, they believe that it inevitably leads to damaging and destructive outcomes for the church and the people it targets.[333]

Early warning signs of a toxic church culture include narcissism and fear. In arguing that there are too many narcissists working as church leaders and that they lack empathy or concern for the welfare of those they lead, McKnight and Barringer ask about the dangers associated with narcissism. They believe narcissistic pastors gather sycophants, admirers and enablers around themselves and isolate anyone who fails to give them the acclaim they demand.[334] McKnight

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[330] Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020).

[331] Ibid., 3.

[332] Ibid., 15.

[333] Ibid., 22, 23.

[334] Ibid., 27.

and Barringer indicate that narcissistic pastors prefer churches and church groups with little or no accountability, citing Ronald Enroth's opinion that

> authoritarian leaders are ecclesiastical loners. … They are fiercely independent and refuse to be part of a structure of accountability.[335]

Toxicity develops in churches when leaders use a 'power hatchet' or a 'blade of fear'. McKnight and Barringer claim that power, fear and narcissism inevitably work together to generate a toxic culture.[336] Cultures built on power through fear begin when a leader's control and approval become God-aligned.

The authors quote a study by Mark Allan Powell which explored the different ways leaders and laypeople understand the Bible. Powell concluded that leaders align themselves with God and Jesus while laypeople see themselves – *and are seen by their leaders* – in the disciples, crowds and general populations.

These two different forms of alignment with biblical texts highlight why approval becomes so important to pastors and laypeople:

> *If Pastor approves of me, then God must approve of me.* And some pastors may want them thinking that way.[337]

A culture of approval by '*status enhancement*' creates the potential for insiders to become intoxicated with their alignment with dominant leaders. Disapproval by leaders similarly leads to 'status degradation', with cultures developing that encourage ambition and arrogance.[338]

When this power derived culture is challenged, verdicts are formed in secret. Clandestine conversations strengthen rewards and threats and can result in those who question anything being banished from the church community.

Toxic cultures, according to McKnight and Barringer, respond to criticism by generating stories and narratives about what they want people to think happened, and by seeking to defend themselves and their church against the version of criticism that is profiled by those who have been adversely impacted by any leader's actions. In addition to telling *their* carefully constructed story, leaders may also criticise the way concerns have been raised with them and use passages such as Matthew 18, 1 Timothy 5:19 and 1 Corinthians 6:1 in these contexts.[339]

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[335] Ibid., 29.

[336] Ibid., 31.

[337] Ibid., 30–38, including 35.

[338] Ibid., 35–37.

[339] Ibid., 41. On unquestioned assumptions about the Bible, McKnight commented that 'the danger is to impose on the text: when we impose on the voice of another person we are no longer listening or respecting their voice so we have to listen carefully so as not to impose' ~10 mins McKnight, *Kingdom Roots*. KR#158, Key Observations from 30+ years.

McKnight and Barringer believe that those who have been abused should avoid meeting with people in power – especially on their own – who use verses from these and similar passages in connection with criticism.[340]

The authors then emphasise that sharing stories is at the heart of the way people find their place and purpose in life and the processes by which humanity understands itself. This means that lying is a form of storytelling designed to deceive and self-preserve by establishing control and profile.[341]

McKnight and Barringer explore a range of false narratives they see associated with toxic cultures. They firstly nominate *discrediting the person* expressing any concerns by calling them liars, attacking their character, questioning their motives or demonising them as evildoers and so not to be trusted. *Character assassination* directs attention to the 'person rather than the facts'.

A second strategy involves generating a 'false narrative that supports the pastor and the church while creating doubt about the allegations'.[342] Even worse, the authors believe that 'the practice of gaslighting introduces a vicious psychological element to a false narrative'. They use Wikipedia's definition of *gaslighting* and cite Stephanie Sarkis' view of its devastating impact and that gaslighters and narcissists attack when questioned and never apologise – as they think apologising indicates weakness.[343]

Another strategy evident in toxic cultures occurs when leaders 'create *false victimization narratives* in which everything is reversed and the perpetrators … become the victims'.[344] McKnight and Barringer mention leaders describing themselves as being *sad*, as having *deep sadness* or being *very sad* in this context.

Efforts to *silence or supress the truth* and convey the impression 'that nothing happened' may accompany these strategies. The authors describe 'Silenced truth [as] an unspoken lie'.[345] Methods used to supress the truth can include shaming, intimidating, threatening, and destroying evidence.

The last strategy concerns *false apologies* which 'condemn the victim, appease the audience, attach excuses, and try to justify inappropriate behaviour'. They believe that one false apology often leads to further false apologies.[346]

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[340] McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing*, 52.

[341] Ibid., 56.

[342] Ibid., 56, 59.

[343] Ibid., 62–64.

[344] Ibid., 65, cf. 69. Italics added.

[345] Ibid., 70.

[346] Ibid., 79. See Wade Mullen, 'What I've Observed When Institutions Try to Apologize and How They Can Do Better,' https://wademullen.xyz/2019/07/19/institutional-apologies/.

Wade Mullen: *Something's not right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse – and Freeing Yourself from Its power* [347]

Introduction

Mullen commences his book by highlighting the deceptive and manipulative nature of abuse. He defines an abuser as someone who treats another person 'as an object they are willing to harm for their own benefit' and points out that abuse is usually empowered by 'words that lead to confusion and captivity'.[348]

Mullen believes abusers use 'impression management' tactics to avoid truth telling and wants his readers to have the language necessary to explain their own stories. He sees truth as the best cure for dishonesty and notes that silence allows evil to prosper.[349]

Organisations and leaders, according to Mullen, either tell the truth and practice transparency 'regardless of the impact on their approval, status, or image' or attempt to achieve legitimacy using the abuser's strategies.[350]

Mullen's book can be considered in two main parts. The first section covers some of the ways abusive people and organisations gain and keep power. The second section seeks to help those who have been abused understand the way abusers are likely to react when evidence of their actions becomes more widely known, and so to help victims better survive abuse.

The nature of abuse

The Show Must Go On

Impression management can be best understood as a form of theatre where abusive people and organisations gain and keep power by deceptive on-stage appearances, while covering up and keeping secret what happens behind the scenes. The perceptions of power abusers gain in this way creates cycles of abuse where abuse recurs with increased frequency and greater impact.[351]

Mullen sees secrecy enabling deception and that this deception is thought to be empowering. He uses Goffman's concept of *disruptive information* to highlight the way audiences, communities and organisations help abusers omit or under-emphasise truth that might threaten abusers' public personas.[352]

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[347] *Something's Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse – and Freeing Yourself from Its power* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020).

[348] Ibid., 2.

[349] Ibid., 2–4, 7.

[350] Ibid., 6.

[351] Ibid., 11.

[352] Ibid., 15, 16.

Mullen refers to Goffman's five kinds of secrets. *Dark secrets* cover up truth that would expose abusers. *Strategic secrets* enable organisations to be ready for different responses, *inside secrets* belong to a small group, *entrusted secrets* involve confidentiality while *free secrets* are shared at no personal cost. These last four become *dark secrets* when abusers use them for their own advantage and at their victims' expense. Mullen concludes that secrets are used in abusive settings to test loyalty. He believes it is important to be aware of the damage done by those who protect *dark secrets* and fail to stop the abuse occurring.[353]

Another aspect of this theatre metaphor involves those in ordained positions of power using the sanctity inherent in their status to covering up wrongs:

> If a leader comes to a sacred role empty, narcissistic, and hungry, they'll likely feverishly quest for legitimacy and meaning … to justify the position and their title. They begin to see people as objects to be manipulated, shaped, and moulded to fit their own agenda.

Tribalism, according to Mullen, is a third potential contributor to abuse. If the persona developed by a leader is challenged – validly or otherwise – the tribe's default position is to conceal the issue and defend the leader. Threatened leaders are then likely to increase their control and emphasis their claims.[354]

Charms

Abusers use flattery, favours and alliances as charms to keep secrets, sacred roles and tribal loyalty operating so their cause can prosper and they can divert attention from their abuse. They develop 'wheels of worship' which seek and test affirmation and mask their abusive actions. They create a culture of fear 'in packages marked "Love"' to conceal their abuse.[355]

Abusers focus on highlighting imagined or actual common interests to generate the impression that there are alliances. They then use these contrived alliances to eliminate threats to their domination and control by gaining 'access to the deepest parts of your soul'. This process assists them in exploiting their target's vulnerabilities for wanting acceptance, harmony and consensus.[356] One way they try to achieve this outcome is by demanding to meet alone with those they think might be threats.[357] By using affirmation, abusers can subtly and 'repeatedly cross boundaries without consequence, knowing they'll be overlooked'.[358]

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[353] Ibid., 17–21.

[354] Ibid., 23, 25, 29.

[355] Ibid., 38, 41.

[356] Ibid., 44, 45.

[357] Ibid., 46.

[358] Ibid., 49.

Dismantling Your Internal World

Mullen believes abusers aim to dismantle a targeted person's inner self by controlling actions designed to make them feel afraid and ashamed. This process enables abusers to dismantle 'the victim's internal world until nothing of substance remains'. Intimidation and humiliation can involve unfair criticism, including by falsely claiming their targeted person is a legalist, is over-sensitive, is harbouring bitterness or is disrespectful.[359]

Mullen cites Langberg's explanation that the word *trauma* means turning, twisting and piercing. Trauma results from processes designed to dismantle and strip a person's self-respect, beliefs and aspirations until 'nothing but ruins' remains. Once an abuser has crossed boundaries, their task of replacing valid pre-existing identities with their fabricated ones becomes easier.[360]

Mullen points out that if someone believes they 'have the right to redefine you [that they] will also feel the freedom to humiliate you' and do so by a variety of means, including by invading your privacy. Once identity and self-respect are undermined, Mullen states that abusers trap their victims by steadily dismantling their ability to make their own decisions.[361]

Dismantling Your External World

The other strand to dismantling a person's world relates to breaking their links to external resources including the personal and group networks from where they gain value and understanding. Fracturing these connections creates a climate of isolation, reduces their access to help, limits their ability to remain informed about the truth of their experiences and leaves them isolated when needing assistance because no-one is listening.[362]

These processes are vital to the abuser when the abuser thinks their schemes might be revealed. Control is increasingly important to them when they think disclosure might occur. They might, according to Mullen, oppose organisational decisions to access external professionals and use biblical passages like Matthew 18 to attempt to undermine the legal system. Abusers can be expected to dismantle connections with sources of information and insight and appeal to their spiritual status and they 'might even claim to have heard directly from God'.[363]

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[359] Ibid., 53, 54, 56.

[360] Ibid., 56, 59. Cf. Boase and Frechette, *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*.

[361] Mullen, *Something's Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse – and Freeing Yourself from Its power*, 59, 62.

[362] Ibid., 69.

[363] Ibid., 70, 72, 74, 75.

Surviving abuse

<u>The Silent Struggle</u>

The harsh reality of being intentionally marginalised and excluded after actively participating in a community is described by Mullen as a

> thick fog [that] descends between the charm that deceived you and the fear and shame you suddenly feel after an abusive attack.[364]

The result is that a victim is disconnected and disoriented from their former friends and supportive structures because a trusted leader has blatantly betrayed them. Mullen outlines a range of difficulties about voicing concerns in this context, including having one's credibility questioned, thinking they should remain loyal or submissive, breaking relationships with the abuser, losing their own reputation, bringing shame on the community, facing legal actions, and being condemned for not following procedures.

To ensure the victim remains silenced, the abuser may add to these dilemmas by intimidation or plea tactics. Mullen nominates some of the kinds of pleading that abusers may use, including looking for compassion while letting the victim suffer without support, placing obligations using coercive silences while failing to meet reasonable expectations, profiling the impact on the abuser's family and friends while disregarding the impact of the abuser's own actions on those close to the victim, saying that the consequences of their actions are too severe while being harsh on the victim, or threatening self-harm.[365]

Mullen states that these pleas are intended to ensure the victim bears the heavy and even unbearable burden of 'the truth about the abuse and … the abuser'.[366]

<u>On the Defence</u>

Mullen believes that the 'tactics used to evade exposure are usually greater in number and complexity than the tactics used to groom others for abuse'.[367] He summarises them in terms of denials, excuses, justifications and comparisons. Denials are designed to call the accusation into question, excuses are aimed at relocating responsibility, justifications are efforts at explaining what happened, while comparisons are used to minimise the significance of what occurred.

Likely excuses include rejection of intention, indication of ability, and blaming another agent. Comparisons might be made to more significant failures, different

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[364] Ibid., 79.

[365] Ibid., 90.

[366] Ibid., 96.

[367] Ibid., 103.

cultural expectations, other corporate standards, or to claims about their own better behaviours.

Concessions

If an abuser's pleas or their attempts to redefine, reframe or relocate what they did are unsuccessful, then concessions are seen by Mullen as another way an abuser may avoid the truth about their actions and any genuine confession accompanied by restitution and repair. Concessions, according to Mullen, are designed to eliminate threats by offering possibilities of reconciliation, while at the same time aiming to ensure that they stay in power, remain in favour with their community and avoid any deserved shame. Their actions naturally mean that their victims remain ashamed and abused.[368]

Concessions tend to leave victims confused, unsure and vulnerable as they are usually brief, vague, avoid naming issues and imply things are resolved. Mullen identifies different types of concessions, including those that criticise the victim for their feelings, those that are appeasements, those that have attachments and those that include excuses.

Mullen calls pseudo-apologies 'apoloscuses'. Some of these false apologies include denial of intent, use of passive and impersonal language, claims about values, rejection of awareness and lack of authority. Terms like blunder, references to other leaders or to ignorance, and silent complicity, can all mask the abuser's deliberate, wilful intentions. They can also create contexts where the abuser virtue-signals to his community that their actions and assessments are appropriate.[369]

Information about Mullen's SCORE card is included in the next review.

Demonstrations

Demonstrations can accompany or follow pleas, defences and concessions. They may involve 'highlighting principles, values, policies, and promises' and are designed to profile positive motivations and improvements in behaviour by focusing on success and achievement, and by eliminating any alternative narrative. The abuser's goal is to maintain their power and status.

Mullen's view is that demonstrations of this kind are deceitful and dangerous in that they create false hopes that 'can do great damage to a person's religious faith, trust in others, and hope for justice'. He references the biblical text in Jeremiah where the prophet rejected the affirmations of peace by those in power and their declarations that they were healing by doing nothing and caring by harming people (cf. Jeremiah 6–9).[370]

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[368] Ibid., 128, 129.

[369] Ibid., 135.

[370] Ibid., 154, 156, 157.

Mullen nominates three kinds of demonstrations. Firstly, statements are used to seek to align the abuser with their victim and then to imply that the victim warrants the consequences that have occurred as are they are not telling the truth, not understanding things clearly, or not innocent. Secondly, distancing uses notions of time and space to dismiss the victim's concerns while, thirdly, the abuser claims they are rehabilitating themselves and possibly their victim, and that they must control any rehabilitation processes.[371]

Several characteristics relating to demonstrations that Mullen identifies include the abuser's persistence, pride and determination to remain as the 'sole authority able to diagnose what happened and what needs to change'.[372]

Refusal to access and contempt for external expertise indicates the extent to which abusers and those aligned with them are intent to avoid any scrutiny of their actions. Victims and their carers face further insults and accusations, creating cycles of scorn and vilification. Demonstrations, according to Mullen, are fleeting while genuine change is longer lasting.[373]

Conclusion

Mullen hopes that legitimate grief can be accompanied by discoveries of language that enlighten and explain a victim's experiences.[374] He believes this process is assisted by decoding, naming and reversing the secret language associated with abuse. He claims that reframing narratives about abuse begins with breaking out from the secrecy that underpins abuse.

Confronting abuse, for Mullen, is doing the opposite of what abusers want. Making sense of it stares down the confusion abusers hope to achieve and speaking exposes the sham silences that abusers prefer. Confronting, Mullen affirms, is about regaining agency by choosing for oneself.[375]

Taking this pathway may lead those wanting to ensure what happened remains hidden to criticise the victim for the trauma caused by their abuse. These criticisms echo the abuser's narrative by doubting the victim and suggesting they are still fragile, bitter, unhealthy, etc. Mullen insists that the best approach is in not simply doing the opposite to what is wrong about the abuse but in doing 'the opposite of what evil wants *you* to do'. If evil wants to destroy its victims, then cultivating beauty is one way of responding – beauty in relationships and the world around us, including through gardening![376]

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[371] Ibid., 158.

[372] Ibid., 162, 163.

[373] Ibid., 165.

[374] Ibid., 171.

[375] Ibid., 173, 174.

[376] Ibid., 174, 177.

Finding and building safe communities is challenging because, according to Judith Herman, it is easy for people to side with abusers and do exactly what they want: nothing. Inaction, Herman states, is contrary to what the victim needs: 'The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering'. Mullen concludes by noting that calls from communities for patience prioritise those in power, while calls for forgiveness reduce advocacy about the abuse.[377]

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[377] Ibid., 180, 186.

Wade Mullen: *When institutions try to apologise*[378]

Mullen states that apologies are often surrounded by defensive barriers which are designed to avoid shame and exclude validity. Leaders, according to Mullen, fear identity, legal and financial repercussions.

A leader's apology may condemn the other person by linking the leader's apology with the other person's feelings rather than by connecting the apology with that leader's actions.

A leader's apology may be self-protective and may not lead to any legitimate form of reconciliatory action.

A leader's apology may be an 'apoloscuse' using various forms. The apologiser may claim that they were innocent as they had no intention of doing anything wrong. They may admit something wrong happened but use language that rejects any form of culpability. They may try and separate what happened from their own values and provide excuses for why what happened occurred. They may claim that they were not culpable because they were unaware of the consequences or that what happened was really someone else's responsibility.

A leader's apology may be self-justifying. Mullen claims that

> There is a fine line between excuses and justifications as both serve a similar purpose, but one way to distinguish them is to think of excuses as attempts to shape your perception of the wrongdoer while justifications are attempts to shape your perception of the wrongs.

Mullen illustrates his statement using two strategies: one claiming that the other person was partly to blame and the other that nothing serious resulted from what happened.

A leader's apology may be self-promoting. Apologies are not trophies.

A leader's apology may look for sympathy. These apologies, according to Mullen, reveal 'an inability on the part of organizational leaders to get outside of themselves'.

Mullen recommends using 'An Apology S.C.O.R.E. Card' to assess the authenticity of any apology.

He writes concerning *surrender* that

> When I analyze statements of institutional apologies, I often observe what remains when every blame, excuse, justification, and self-promotion is crossed out. Sometimes nothing remains.

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[378] Mullen, 'What I've Observed When Institutions Try to Apologize and How They Can Do Better'.

True *surrender* leads to authentic *confession* involving clear and accurate statements about what went wrong. *Surrender* and *confession* then must lead to active personal and organisational *ownership*.

Recognition is where the consequences of what went wrong are identified. From these four processes comes an opportunity to express non-condescending *empathy* without blame- or shame-shifting.

Mullen concludes by stating that when these steps occur 'the difficult work of restitution and restoration' can begin and the words 'We are so sorry' can have true authenticity.

David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen: *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*[379]

Spiritual abuse and its victims

This book begins by emphasising that spiritual abuse in Christian groups occurs too often. Johnson and VanVonderen write with a sense of urgency as they believe spiritual abuse traps abusers and those abused in different ways.

They commence their analysis of spiritual abuse by using an illustration of the way power can be misused to shift the focus from abusive *behaviours* to the *person* expressing concern. The only response acceptable to the pastor in their example was to agree with the pastor's false claims and not dispute anything the pastor asserted or alleged. The pastor attributed questions to a faulty attitude and assumed the worst about the person expressing concern. Manipulation resulted from a power play where the pastor used their position and profile to indicate that since questions were being asked, the *questioner* must be wrong.

The authors define spiritual abuse as mistreatment of someone by a leader using their authority to weaken, undermine or diminish that person's spiritual growth. They state that spiritual abuse devalues, shames, blames, belittles, degrades and attacks people. They conclude that spiritual systems are abusive, 'an inversion in the body of Christ', when people are used to meet the demands of leaders 'for power, importance, intimacy, [and] value'.[380] These type of leaders attempt to attain self-determined goals by utilising those they are supposed to serve and mature for their own purposes.

Johnson and VanVonderen highlight the weariness resulting from additional efforts to comply with abusive leaders' ever-increasing demands, demands that primarily involve these leaders' needs and not the welfare of those for whom they are supposed to care. These leaders cause destruction by injecting 'the venom of performance-based religion'.[381]

The authors emphasise that noticing a problem and protecting oneself does not make someone the problem. They point out that those who have experienced spiritual abuse are usually placed under so much pressure *not* to mention what has happened to them that 'they feel alone, even crazy'.[382]

Having outlined their initial thoughts about spiritual abuse, the authors identify difficulties that may accompany those who are being or have been spiritually abused. These difficulties include distorted views of God and God's grace,

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[379] David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen, *Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse, The: Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority within the Church* (South Bloomington, Minnesota, USA: Bethany House Publishers, 1991).

[380] Ibid., 23 (page numbers from Kindle).

[381] Ibid., 32.

[382] Ibid., 40.

preoccupations with performance, shame-based self-images, concerns about spiritual authorities, problems with personal boundaries and responsibilities, bunker mentalities, reticence in admitting abuses have occurred, and struggles with trusting God and spiritual systems.

After stressing that perpetrators are *always* responsible for the resultant abuse, the authors consider why people end up in abusive relationships and why they remain in them. They suggest people stay in abusive, power-based relationships because of the potential loss of friends, the time and effort they have invested, and other people's opinions. They are afraid of what a perpetrator might do, they are unsure how well they will cope, and they think things might somehow change. They usually experience self-blame and accept views about themselves that are untrue.

The lack of power in adults who remain in abusive situations is described as *learned powerlessness* and is evident in them being overwhelmed by shame. Relationships based on shame lead to those shamed feeling awful, inferior and worthless, and result from leaders and groups aiming to silence them. These messages include:

- blaming by 'name-calling, belittling, [and] put-downs'.[383]

- focusing on earning acceptance.

- adopting potent, tacit, 'can't-talk' behaviours that label people as problems when they expose concerns. Manipulating people also occurs by sending messages through other agents.[384]

- demanding compliance to false and unrealistic expectations.

- making people pay for and publicly confess their alleged mistakes.

- concealing leaders' shortcomings and denying normal experiential learning.

- unbalancing relationships, leading to under-involvement and neglect or over-involvement and enmeshment.

These shame-based relationships involve fear, undermine honesty and handicap social and spiritual maturity. They aim to cultivate reliance on false leaders who construct deficient systems where self-promoting profiles are more significant that actual, substantial identities. They victimise people and leave them ready to be trapped in other abusive situations.

The authors conclude this section by stating that '*When those who notice the problem become the problem, beware! The truth is never the problem*'.[385] They then describe seven characteristics that they believe are common to all spiritually

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[383] Ibid., 54.

[384] Ibid., 56.

[385] Ibid., 62.

abusive systems and express concern for those who leave abusive situations only to end up in another abusive environment. These characteristics are:

- power-posturing.

- a preoccupation with performance and conformity: 'Transformation is an inside-out job; not outside-in. Don't allow yourself to be squeezed'.[386]

- unspoken, potent rules. These rules include a *don't tell anyone* rule which protects leaders behind facades of silence and leads to blame- and shame-based attacks on those who question anything or mention any concerns.

- unbalanced living resulting in over-objectivity or over-subjectivity.

- paranoia by leaders and groups wanting protection from outsiders, claiming they have superior insights, and 'keeping people wounded' and needy.[387]

- misplaced loyalty to leaders and groups, leading to a leaders-are-always-correct mind-set, and to intimidation and humiliation.

- secretive behaviours that hide evidence to protect their reputations and doctrines: These systems and their leaders 'become God's "public relations agents." The truth is, [God's] not hiring anyone for this position'.[388]

These systems, the authors conclude, are inevitably abusive. They aim to prevent people leaving and invariably result in those in abusive spiritual systems becoming fatigued, wounded and poorly prepared for substantial living in other situations.

Abusive spiritual systems develop because people are conditioned not to seek and follow God's will by and for themselves. Leaders of these types of abusive systems require conformity to their own definitions of biblical standards by using methods which enhance their personal agendas. Several motivational themes used by these leaders include inappropriate use of rules and distorted emphases on doing Christianity, including self-denial, giving, unity and peace, and church discipline.

Abusive leaders and why they are trapped

The authors begin by indicating that they hope some leaders might be helped and not hindered by their reasoning.

They initially focus on leaders asserting their authority based primarily on their 'rank, position, status, or title', rather than on any inherent wisdom, discernment or truthfulness. Their claims remind Johnson and VanVonderen of the 'maddening attitude' which ignores that the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost, 'blew … to pieces' the

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[386] Ibid., 65.

[387] Ibid., 73.

[388] Ibid., 78.

male-privileged, race- and age-based Hebrew system's discrimination against women – especially young Gentile women.[389]

They believe people submit to authentic authority and not simply to offices and roles. Authenticity, they claim, evokes trust by acting with integrity and by being honest. Even, and perhaps especially, where there is disagreement and dissent, leaders who talk 'straight' are more likely to be trustworthy: 'You know where you stand. It feels safe. It's even safe to disagree'.[390]

The authors believe that abusive leaders get caught in spiritual double-binds in which their double-lives involve 'shiny' appearances profiling trust while they are suppressing inappropriate behaviours. They warn that what's inside a person is eventually revealed.[391] A lack of integrity includes double-talk as well as leading a double life based on positive appearances and untrue and misleading assertions.

False spiritual leaders make ambiguous claims with concealed and contradictory messages, and insist that anyone asking clarifying questions is spiritually, socially and psychologically deficient. While sounding 'pious enough', these leaders 'don't talk straight', give answers that have double meanings and leave people 'with the vague sense that something is missing'.

> [You] cannot confront them or pin anything down. It [is] hard to know where you stand. … You can't get anywhere with [them]. … Meanings and motives keep slipping away.[392]

These false spiritual leaders often excuse themselves from answering legitimate questions by blaming questioners for not asking their questions appropriately.

People are damaged by leaders lying and making promises to gain trust. These false spiritual leaders give illusions of safety and tranquillity in their attempts to do as they please and grasp what they want. They 'slowly stick in the spiritual knife and drain the life blood from you', causing their victims to have problems in trusting anyone else.[393]

False leaders focus on their images and appearances, on adulation and honour, rather than on substance. They do these things at the expense of recognising and valuing other people. The authors profile image-oriented, adulation-seeking leaders as working from false authority contexts, as lacking integrity, as ensuring their spirituality is visible, as requiring recognition and calling it respect, and as being a primary and authoritative source of wisdom and guidance.

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[389] Ibid., 113.

[390] Ibid., 121.

[391] Ibid., 122.

[392] Ibid., 126.

[393] Ibid., 129.

This type of leadership, according to Johnson and VanVonderen, leads to an inverted spirituality which focuses on details that ensure essential, core issues are avoided. Spiritually abusive systems result when 'the insignificant becomes the significant, and the significant becomes insignificant. The irrelevant becomes paramount, and the trivial becomes vital'.[394]

Spiritual leaders in these systems try to control people's behaviours by focusing on religious performance, church tradition and works-righteousness. They replace initial alluring promises with obligations – obligations that end up devouring people's lives by prioritising the implicitly and explicitly demanded needs of the leader and the leader's religious system.

Abusive spiritual systems declare: 'Don't think, don't discern, don't question, and don't notice problems'. They posture peace by covering up and avoiding transparency and accountability. Their need for power, control and recognition takes precedence over the community's nurture and growth: 'Abusive systems don't serve and equip people, … they use people up'.[395]

Johnson and VanVonderen believe that abuse arrives in 'very subtle packages', that it consumes people and leads to 'damaging consequences'. Abusive leaders claim they want people to participate in their communities and to glorify God, but their inner motivation relates to successful and attractive appearances: 'At this point, [their] ego has begun to feed upon you'.[396]

Post-abuse recovery

The third section begins with Johnson and VanVonderen repeating that they see spiritual abuse as a 'widespread and … deeply ingrained problem' which damages people and sends false messages about the gospel. They remind readers that spiritually abusive systems are traps that 'fit with the wounds people have experienced in other unhealthy relationships'. Identifying these traps, they suggest, can help in recognising and leaving abusive spiritual systems.[397]

Spiritually abusive systems capture people easily and make escape difficult. While their bait is attractive, those captured become exhausted as they struggle to cope and leave. Leaders of these abusive systems profile power and require unquestioning loyalty and obedience. They threaten people and make them afraid to leave, while claiming to impart divine approval if people work hard for them.

Leaders in spiritually abusive systems continually shift expectations so that they are never reached. Johnson and VanVonderen explain this phenomenon in terms

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[394] Ibid., 141.

[395] Ibid., 175.

[396] Ibid., 176.

[397] Ibid., 181.

of *equity rescuing*. People in abusive relationships usually compare each additional abusive incident against the previous one rather than in terms of a safe, pre-abusive environment. Those abused often under-estimate the latest violation and attempt to set up boundaries, hoping – mostly in vain – that these new markers will not be crossed. While the extent of a violation is compared to a previous incident, the consequences of leaving are considered in terms of the person's overall involvement in the abusive system.

After considering another aspect of an effective trap that the authors identify, namely how well suited the abusive system is to its victims, the authors' revisit their earlier seven-point summary of the methods spiritually abusive systems use and the learned powerlessness of those impacted.

People impacted by spiritual abuse may move from denial to delusion, to where their perceptions are distorted to such an extent that they remain trapped in abusive systems. They may become over-focused on trying to justify past achievements. Their moods may alter as they fail to discern or listen to warnings about their 'religious addiction'.[398]

Johnson and VanVonderen identify four things that victims of these systems may need to consider if they are to escape from these abusive systems. They need to be able to name their experiences as abuse. They need to recover a sense of normality about divine truth and personal identity. They need safe relationships in which to recover, and they need to regain an appreciation of authentic Christian faith.

Central to these factors is accepting that spiritually abusive systems increasingly wound people with lies and dishonesty, and that this injuring process highlights the need for those abused to renew and refresh their understanding of authentic relationships, genuine spirituality and affirming community.

The authors conclude by outlining aspects of what is to be expected if people leave abusive systems or if they remain in them and try to change them.

Questions relating to leaving include:

•   Are grace-filled relationships likely?

•   Are you supporting a system you oppose?

•   Are you wanting to be proved right?

•   Is staying in the system costing you and those you love too much?

•   Are you deciding and keeping your own boundaries?

•   Are you at peace knowing God cares more than you do?

•   Is the system better off being unsuccessful?

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[398] Ibid., 189, 190.

- Are you trying to help the system while being exhausted?

- Are you listening to those who have already left?

- Are you sure you know what is best for you to be doing?

Those who want to remain and resist an abusive system are advised to:

- decide whom they are serving.

- be wise about the contest.

- be ready for resistance.

- keep telling the truth.

- recognise the spiritual enemy.

- stay close to God.

- accept that all messes are not bad.

- confront the problems.

- be aware of the way healthy systems operate.

- recognise disconnections between responsibility and authority.

Responses to these snapshots

Martin Luther King Jr.

Black lives matter. Indigenous lives matter. Oppressed lives matter. All life matters and has much to learn from black, indigenous and oppressed people.

Lay-people volunteering their Time, Energy, Expertise and Means (TEEM) in addition to their daily vocational employment commitments matter. Leaders have no-one to lead and no FEET (Finance-Energy-Expertise-Time) with which to walk unless laypeople provide this TEEM-work.

Hostile dividing walls and toxic asbestos ceilings need urgent dismantling. Reconciliation based on mutual respect and understanding needs pro-active development through transparent, truthful and trustworthy dialogues.

I believe that the oppressive actions of self-entitled church ministers and the collective silences of their colleagues are significant barriers to genuine and vibrant Christian community.

I believe that King's four step-program when making nonviolent responses to violating behaviours – including by responding to those who passively assent to leaders who use segregation processes – provides a helpful process for anyone marginalised and discriminated against because of ethnicity, gender, social or economic status, or religious beliefs.

I believe that some form of nonviolent direct action is necessary when facts are concealed and not accessed, and when negotiation is avoided or eliminated. Allowance for and support with 'self-purification' is necessary to ensure one's personal wellbeing is attended to, and, just as importantly, to ascertain as well as possible that those close to oneself are cared for and affirmed.

Immanuel Kant

Light shining in our hearts

The first verse my parents encouraged me to memorise was 2 Corinthians 4:6. Among other features, they thought I'd enjoy the number pattern! The context of the passage mentions the transformative impact of unveiled faces seeing 'the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror'. Just as the Spirit-Lord brings liberty, so Paul's open truthful encounters commended him to those with whom he communicated. These proclamations reveal

> the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul then reminds his readers that these treasures are in fragile 'clay jars' so that God's power is revealed. He believed they were

> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

Elsewhere Paul indicated that the price of true enlightenment includes being lamb chops for religious and civic barbeques (Romans 8:36 paraphrased)!

God's extraordinary power?

I believe that whatever issues might arise from Kant's views on enlightenment, his concerns about religious leaders using privilege, power and position to dominate laypeople remain valid.

- Privilege seems to infect the way biblical passages are interpreted. I have heard male eldership in churches and male headship in marriages emphasised while other issues mentioned in these texts, including those that relate to divorce, unbelieving children and widows, are passed over.

- Power seems to infect the way authority-submission is used when issues are managed in unacceptable ways, and when those who express concern are profiled as inadequate and inferior. This use of power leads to an inversion process where actual issues are avoided, and their impact on others becomes a convenient diversionary focus.

- Prominence and self-promotion can infect the way the authority-submission construct is used. Subordinates are told that they are not fit for certain roles or forms of response because those in power believe they can make decrees about them that carry divine authority. Participation in church-life is not publicly honoured and input is presumed, so weakening the effectiveness of the community concerned, with those affected undermined and dispirited.

It can be helpful to identify settings which serve to enhance privileged voices, position power, personal profile and prominence. Seeking to explore biblical understandings about presuming on privilege, power and prominence can be assisted by identifying the context of both the author and the passage. Excluding people because of their gender, race or socio-economic group should be of great concern (Mark 10:32–43; cf. Galatians 3:28).

When doctrines of incarnation, atonement and Trinity are used to indicate an ultra-hierarchal approach to human relationships, there are grounds for concern about those who are marginalized by these approaches. Care is needed to ensure that God's person and works are not contradicted by the attitudes adopted about inter-personal relationships.

George Orwell

God does not live at the top of windowless pyramids or ziggurats.[399] Up is not good while down is bad. God is the down-God as well as the up-God. 'The earth is the LORD's' as well as the heavens (Psalm 24)! The divine silence at Golgotha was because God was *in* Christ and not a detached 'we see' observer. God is the *with-us* God, as confirmed by the baptism and transfiguration narratives.

The spirit-creation narrative becomes the redemptive Eve testimony, affirmed by Hannah and Mary and the women who were the first apostles of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus affirmed his mother's testimony:

> My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. … He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty (Luke 2:46–55).

The *Cult of Christendom* – which is not the *Community of Christianity* – apparently works such that no ordained minister, priest or licensed pastor is ever to restrain another colleague engaging in what they know a layperson might consider to be inappropriate behaviour. Furthermore, they work on the basis that they must avoid mentioning any inappropriate behaviour by a colleague and that they must avoid contradicting any verdict about a layperson, however invalid, insulting and inaccurate that judgement might appear to be. The result of these two *ecclesiastical laws* is that the *worst* assessment of any layperson is the *final* declaration that prevails and spreads like a cancer or a coronavirus as the official and irreversible verdict within the *Cult of Christendom*.

Acceptance of this judgement is tacitly required of a layperson if they enter within the *Cult of Christendom* anywhere. To paraphrase George Orwell:

> *Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, the Cult of Christendom collapses.*[400]

I believe that ministers who repeatedly, insistently and blatantly contradict the testimony of those who serve them, and who refuse transparency and avoid the truth, deny their helpers legitimate decency and dignity, and work against community and personal welfare.

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[399] Cf. Nicodemus' testimony: 'Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?"' (John 7:50).

[400] Cf. Orwell, *1984*, Part One, Section 7, 68.

René Girard and Thomas Pietsch

A discussion of mimetic theory and its relevance to one's personal experiences of religious leaders transfers Girard's insights into living encounters with leaders in human organisations. This transfer becomes more clearly focused when organisations and their leaders act to conceal and corrupt information and to produce and proclaim what can be reasonably seen to be self-serving narratives.

Pietsch's emphasis on Girard's view that the Bible unmasks mythology and scapegoating by relating it to the death of Jesus as an innocent victim provides a framework for interpreting, understanding and applying atonement theology in practical ministry settings.

I believe that when ministers oppose a layperson expressing concerns about inappropriate and unwelcome behaviours, that those ministers are scapegoating that person in a sacrificial act to protect their own and their colleagues' interests.

I believe that naming scapegoating as friendship and profiling it as rehabilitative and restorative are hideous perversions of the divine revelation disclosed in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. I do not believe these kinds of actions provide authentic evidence of the presence of God.

Kevin Giles

Reframing abuses of power, position and privilege as relationship issues is unmasked by comparing them with slavery, racism, misogyny and elitism. Memories of exodus and exile were central to Hebrew and Jewish identity. They are evident in the priorities they assigned to caring for widows, orphans and exiles.

Jesus' pre-crucifixion accommodation in Jerusalem contrasts the power-domination of the religious elites that murdered him, as does Stephen's post-Pentecost testimony prior to being stoned by the same elites.

Paul's emphasis on God not showing partiality, on Jesus' dismantling of dividing walls, on integrating Jewish and Gentile believers, and on reframing marriage, family and slavery as a cruciform understanding of incarnational humility and sacrifice, were not his inventions or an unexpected accident of history. His testimony about *being* in and not just *entering* Christ was not some ephemeral dream but a present anticipation and intention. They were

> all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:26–29).

I believe that when these truths are set aside in favour of declarations about women and laypeople as lacking resilience or being too insistent on expressing their concerns that what may appear normal degenerates into abuse.

I believe that the use of 'euphemistic and obfuscating wording' provides a superficial mask in attempting to conceal these abusive behaviours.

I believe that when the words 'roles', 'relationships', 'issues' and 'interests' are used to insist on making violating declarations while simultaneously being profiled to claim friendship and also demanded as reasons for abdicating from basic responsibilities, then something amiss is occurring.

Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer

Scot McKnight *did* three substantial things – actions that were not mirages or imaginary delusions, but actual, historical realities that were evident to those with whom he had contact.

He *did* something, something involving truth, trust and transparency rather than power and privilege. He asked questions, collected relevant information and reflected intelligently and wisely on what he learned.

He *did* something, something visible and public which affirmed his belief in those who were vulnerable to what he describes as toxic leaders. His approach was not clandestine or secretive but visible and able to be validated.

He *did* something, something that explained suitable processes organisations and leaders can use to avoid toxicity and focus on *tov*, and which vulnerable laypeople can access to understand when they are being subjected to toxicity rather than *tov.*

McKnight and Barringer's focus on organisational culture and leadership moves attention from isolated events to patterns of community life. When narcissistic leaders read the Bible through the lens of self-virtue and self-entitlement, they see themselves as *above* those *under* them. The Scriptures then become an agent for manipulating people as objects which are little more than toys in their ecclesiastical sandpits, as one minister depicted people for whom he was supposed to care.

I believe that when leaders see themselves in biblical God-roles and use the Bible to subvert and pervert these narratives about justice, righteousness, compassion and care for the disadvantaged and marginalised, then the stories they tell will increase the likelihood of them gaslighting anyone who becomes aware of the extent to which they silence or supress the truth.

The authors' frame these behaviours in terms of toxic cultures dominated by narcissistic ministers who prefer contexts devoid of meaningful accountability. They claim that organisations and communities can rapidly disintegrate when these characteristics align.

I believe that their emphasis on *Scripture, status, suppression, silence and secrets* being utilised to generate false narratives that discredit anyone who questions their actions needs careful consideration. I believe that this inversion process is perverse and insidious, and that it is designed to intimidate and threaten anyone who questions them and to avoid scrutiny or accountability.

I believe that generating affirming personal narratives that accurately assert one's dignity and decency in this context can be virtually impossible.

The Gospel narratives about power, along with the writings of Paul, John, James, Jude and Peter – as well as the book of Hebrews – reinforce the earlier Hebrew-Jewish prophetic testimony against this form of domination:

> Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away (1 Peter 5:1–4).

Wade Mullen

Wade Mullen's realisation that his experience fitted the profile of being abused reflected his inner sensing that something was not right about what had happened to him. The use of sacred roles in power plays, the breakdown of relationships with people he had previously trusted, the realisation that claims of friendship were facades which enabled secrets, silence, abdication and control to flourish, and the application of impression management techniques provided him with confronting evidence that 'This is abuse'.

Mullen's mention of *impression management* possibly understates what may well have been *impression leadership* where strategic intentions, people controlling, and risk-aware actions reflected leadership behaviours more than just management and organisational events. One consistent theme in his book is his encouragement that his readers find language which assists them as they reflect on their experiences and enables them to not remain silent about their past.

Reconstructing and reassembling one's identity, dignity and decency after being dismembered and dismantled is not easy and requires frameworks, words and understanding. Seeing the Bible in this way can bring fresh insights into the Jesus-story, its background in Hebrew and Jewish history, and its developments in the newly established early churches.

Realising one has been abused opens a parallel journey in navigating through the way abuse impacts on one's well-being and immediate relationships. Finding a way ahead that includes an increased awareness of both abuse and its impact is vital for

anyone impacted by the false and misleading narratives of leaders who choose abuse over truth, trust and transparency.

David Johnson and Jeff VanVonderen

This book, originally published in 1991, is written from within an evangelical doctrinal and ministry context, and with charismatic sympathies. I believe that its authors' concerns now have greater relevance since evangelicals and Pentecostals increasingly define themselves by social power-based agendas involving male dominance and privilege over women, and also are more identified with spiritual, ethical and moral leadership crises. Theological and 'gospel' issues have faded into a less visible background narrative.

Interspersed throughout the book are some details of one of Jeff VanVonderen's early workplaces and the difficulties that he experienced in it.[401] VanVonderen describes this workplace as originally being a healthy and effective environment but that leadership goals changed it from prioritising helping clients and caring for them to appearing successful and achieving targets. When unethical activities developed and unprofessional behaviour occurred, the leaders dismissed staff feedback about these concerns and harmony declined.

Workplace leaders rejected external input and openly and passively profiled an all-sufficient and superior profile. Jeff found being in that workplace increasingly dysfunctional. He and his colleagues collectively attempted to patch up problems and change the culture – efforts that proved unsuccessful and draining and which distracted them from their core activities, setting up a scenario which focused on him as *the* problem.

His 'Where do you go from there?' question emphasises his difficult dilemma. Repeatedly confronting the system produced the same response: *he* was the problem for naming the actual problem, not the problem he identified. In wanting the workplace culture to change and disliking a situation that was contrary to his values, he realised he was negatively impacting his wife and being enslaved and captured. He was losing his integrity and his 'emotional health'.[402]

He realises that the problem the system focused on – himself – was one he could change. He was unable to change the system but he was able to change himself and his involvement in the abusive system. He could stop supporting the system by resigning, even though that involved significant costs.

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[401] Johnson and VanVonderen, *Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse, The: Recognizing and Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority within the Church*, 76, 78, 214ff.

[402] Ibid., 214.

Perspectives and applications

The first two of these perspectives and applications were prepared at the request of church leaders at different times for different reasons. The last perspective and application provides some reflections on the meanings of terms frequently used when relational difficulties are being discussed.

Understanding leadership

Leader's priorities, profiles, processes and perspectives

Leaders' priorities

I endeavoured to participate intelligently and caringly in Christian communities throughout my working life and beyond. I heard of and experienced a range of behaviours from ordained ministers, ordained priests and licensed pastors that I tried to understand using various perspectives and frameworks.

I believe their priorities, profiles and processes related to choices reflecting the extent to which they appeared to be self-absorbed and self-promoting or the level at which they were centred and oriented on serving other people.

Laypeople inevitably develop ways of viewing those who lead churches and related organisations. Their perspectives may help when disruption occurs and may warn before crises happen. They may also assist when unexpected events suddenly occur and generous, careful and diligent work is discarded and denigrated over behaviours that leaders determinedly cover-up and conceal.

The viewpoints of those not employed by churches and related organisations are informed by work experiences and associated training and education in other contexts. These external perspectives and frameworks add insights to what happens in Christian communities – insights which Christian leaders may find threatening or valuable, depending on their self-perceptions.

Those wanting to understand the priorities community leaders choose may benefit from asking four questions. Their answers may help inform them of the extent to which a leader is to be *trusted*, the level of *transparency* that can be expected and the way *truth* will be explained.

- In what ways do leaders respond when they are included in laypeople's joy-bringing experiences (such as births and weddings)?

- In what ways do leaders respond when they are involved in laypeople's grief-bringing experiences (such as illness, death and funerals)?

- In what ways do leaders respond when they learn about good things happening to laypeople that inconvenience or over-shadow their own profiles (such as successful lay ministry or vocational achievements)?

- In what ways do leaders respond when they learn about things happening to laypeople because of apparently inappropriate behaviours by leaders that inconvenience their own profiles and may cause conflicting loyalties with other leaders or with laypeople (such as alleged abusive actions by a leader against a layperson)?

Leaders' profiles

The way leaders make explicit or tacit requests of those in their communities helps reveal their views about themselves and their responsibilities. If their requests are dominated by position, power and privilege, they may be working on a God-Christ-leader-led construct reflecting a leader-helper theology not unlike that used to subordinate women and other marginalised groups. These narratives help create a culture of needy dependency in the minds and hearts of laypeople who then more easily feel obliged to help their leaders.

I have seen four themes emerge when power-privilege-prominence position-based narratives are used. Laypeople are expected to ignore concerns about leader's behaviours and to care for them by

- praying for them.

- providing for them.

- praising them.

- pitying them.

These four actions are all commendable when functioning in healthy mutually supportive environments. They are of concern when used to cover up, conceal, divert from and dismiss unwelcome behaviours. These concerns are exacerbated when praying for their leaders involves closing eyes to obvious realities, when providing for them means giving support while ignoring what they are doing, when praising them involves expressing delight without doubting apparent inconsistencies and when pitying them requires sympathy without insight.

Leaders' processes

The lifecycle laypeople experience may include several stages. Since the survival and growth of voluntary organisations largely depends on unpaid goodwill and generosity, any new participants are usually met with *enthusiasm*. Welcoming greetings often include identifying what benefits the community may gain from the new person's presence – with their *presence* hopefully leading to *participation*, and with their *participation* intended to become some form of (usually subordinated) *partnership*.

Enthuse becomes use. Hierarchical organisations with subordinated laypeople and super-ordinated leaders readily assign laypeople to categories of usefulness. Their presence may be seen in terms of them as *objects* and as being *other* to the

leadership group. Utilitarianism means cold and clinical relationships where the layperson's world may shrink to insignificance in the leader's mindset.

Use becomes excuse. Excuses may emerge from leaders as they disconnect from the layperson in the hope that subordinates will somehow survive on institutional inertia and group identity.

Excuse may lead to abuse. Abusive behaviours may occur as ecclesiastical distance and impersonal perception increase and become habitual.

Abuse may become refuse and dispose. The initial enthusiasm may be discarded with the *other object* status of the layperson creating scope in the leader's perceptions for excluding and rejecting scrutiny of or accountability for the leader's actions.

Laypeople may be described – and may consider themselves – within this cycle using two equivalent acronyms: TEEM and FEET. These acronyms identify qualities that are important in mainly voluntary organisations.

- TEEM represents a person's time, energy, expertise and money/means.

- A person's finances, energy, expertise and time are their FEET.

These commendable qualities may be easily exploited when laypeople are generous and trusting. This *objectification* of laypeople as subordinated *others* can involve them being treated as

- *tools* to be used and exploited for a leader's own advantage.

- *trophies* to be paraded for a leader's self-validation.

- *toys* to be played with and manipulated for a leader's self-indulgence and self-entitled enjoyment.

I believe something is seriously amiss especially when tools-trophies-toys narratives involve disdainful, demeaning and denigrating discrimination based on gender, race, social class and economic welfare.

Leaders' perspectives

Towards toxicity

Leaders may be more likely to *give* only to *get* if they have a zero-sum leadership approach. They may preference acting this way and focus on people increasing involvement to build capacity when they feel pressured or where they are ambitious. Laypeople may find double binds eventuate when this occurs:

- *The more they do the less acknowledgement and affirmation they receive. They may also find that if they do more, even more is expected.* Narratives by their leaders about friendship may emerge along with other supposedly positive euphemisms when something different is occurring.

- If the layperson identifies an emerging support vacuum, then they may find that *the more that they ask, the less they receive*. Even worse, they may discover that *the more they ask, the more they are criticised*. They are faced with unwelcome alternatives: silence means vulnerability to more unwelcome behaviours while speaking means further inappropriate behaviours.

Their leader's clear messages become power statements:

- Laypeople are expected to be servile, obsequious acolytes who never make comments, complaints or criticisms, and who never ask questions or query anything.

- Laypeople are expected to have no opinions other than those espoused by their leaders, no ideas apart from those expressed or expected by these leaders, no values that contradict anything done by their leaders, and no rest or respite as that might place the organisation or leader at some disadvantage.

Such a culture is well on the way to being toxic with people required to fulfil four 'laws': *Don't think (no opinions), don't initiate (no ideas), don't expect (no values) and don't stop (no rest or respite or reaction).*

This culture becomes one where only the leader *votes* (as all-powerful ruler or rector), only the leader has *voice* (as priest providing or excluding access and involvement) and only the leader has permissible *views* (as curator determining the identity and integrity of those in the community).

Towards trauma

People who remain too long in toxic cultures out of loyalty to the community or because of their faith in God may find themselves traumatised by these behaviours – behaviours that they may find contrary to biblical teaching.

The coercive power of solidary silence by leadership groups may serve to exacerbate a layperson's concerns. They may fear that offending one leader implies and involves offending the whole community. They may be concerned about the way they might be actively criticised by leaders wanting to avoid admitting failure. They may be disquieted by conditional praise from leaders who demand silence and remain quiet about the layperson's concerns.

Even worse, they may find the leader claiming friendship with them, declaring they are helping to resolve issues by their proactive so-called restorative ministries and self-virtue signalling about their leadership – while actively engaging in power-plays, controlling narratives about what happened, doing nothing to resolve anything, and failing to do even the basics of responsible and caring leadership.

Along with these significant difficulties, there may be recurrent boundary crossing by leaders with requirements that no expectations are placed on them while they

continue to insist that there are no alterations to – and even increased demands on – the layperson's participation and involvement.

Toxicity may lead towards trauma when a subordinated layperson is informed that they are only permitted to resolve crises with the person or group who they believe acted or are continuing to act inappropriately. Their difficulties may be increased by hierarchical differentiations that include gender, social class, ethnic group, educational background and personal qualities and gifts.

Once this happens, any *professional standards* are reduced to a single rule:

> Ordained ministers, ordained priests and licensed pastors are free to do whatever they like, whenever they like, in whatever way they like to whomever they choose without accountability outside of themselves.

Other leaders may quietly empathise or alternatively choose to be seen by an allegedly offending leader as aligned with them. These aligned colleagues may join in further criticisms of the already vulnerable layperson. These patterns of alignment may re-emerge as default responses that *forever reinforce each other and condemn a layperson by using toxic narratives that lack substance and scrutiny.*

These patterns may be affirmed by organisational hierarchies whose processes are oriented to preference leaders over laypeople and to see laypeople as problems to be solved rather than people to be listened to and trusted.

Leaders' apologies and expressions of appreciation

Personal or official communications

Leader's apologies – if they occur and break the usual silence that simply hopes to benefit by using systemic inertia to avoid scrutiny – may be framed as personal, as being concerned about relationships, or as involving friendship. This process seeks to *elevate* the apology from the recipient's perspective when its intention may be to *avoid* any organisational and official accountability.

Any layperson receiving this kind of apology should think carefully about what is occurring. If the leader's apology relates to an incident involving and affecting the layperson's presence, participation and partnership in the community, then this so-called *personal* response is likely to be a cover-up and a concealment. This type of apology may reinforce the vulnerability of the layperson and raise questions about *whether the community is a safe place not only for the layperson involved but for anyone.*

By reframing the context *from ministry to private* and *from official to personal*, the leader subverts the narrative to minimise and probably exclude meaningful scrutiny and accountability. If the vulnerable subordinated party mentions what they have experienced beyond the self-declared private boundaries of this ecclesiastical power-play, they are opening themselves up to *public criticism as they*

have apparently rejected an apology. Laypeople may be faced with the reality that issues remain unaddressed and that their unwelcome alternatives include either being silenced or criticised.

Leaders are decision makers, community gatekeepers and narrative generators and can use forms of power-play including intimidation, coercion, blackmail, gaslighting, scapegoating, manipulation, control and domination to ensure that no one listens to the layperson about the layperson's concerns. The layperson is faced with the reality of being powerless and impotent about what occurred.

Similar dilemmas relate to apparent expressions of appreciation. These can be used for the same purposes, namely, to appear supportive while intending to silence, subvert, divert and invert any criticism.

False apologies

As well as claiming to be personal rather than acknowledging the impact of official status, so-called apologies may make no mention of any specific failure by the leader, may give no indication of any changes the leader is prepared to make, and may focus almost if not completely on the affected subordinated layperson. This focus may include statements with possible implications that shame and blame the layperson and suggest that the actual concern is about their deficiencies.

Typical examples include being sorry for what the layperson is thinking, being sorry that the layperson feels hurt and being sorry that the layperson has withdrawn and is no longer involved (while hoping for a change of mind). If these statements are made *without any resolution of the inappropriate behaviour that occurred* including *any appropriate acknowledgement of what happened* and *any substantial alteration by th*e leader of the leader's behaviour, then it is unlikely that the layperson will be – and can reasonably feel to be – safe in that environment.

Playing the politics of guilt and shame on those already affected by unwelcome behaviours may exacerbate difficult situations. Restoration involves different aspects including confession, conviction, repentance, forgiveness, restitution and reconciliation. Each aspect is essential and none of them are optional. All of them involve both parties in different ways. Forgiveness, for example, may be received or rejected, but can be offered. Forgiveness has a forensic aspect that should not be ignored: its reception involves the forgiver recognising and accepting *what has happened* without accepting *that what happened was appropriate*.

Procedural fairness, transparency and accountability

Denominational professional standards provide terminology definitions and institutional processes. They suggest that procedural fairness, transparency and

accountability are important. They imply that hierarchical position would not affect their deliberations.[403]

However, when local churches and independent, incorporated bodies engage in *off the record* decision making that conceals their processes and declares actions in public places as personal and not official, then it appears that they are generating false narratives that protect the powerful and malign those they are called to serve. This conclusion is more likely if the subordinated person is unaware of the deliberations and excluded from them.

Councils, boards and their leaders have responsibilities to their communities and especially to those who participate as volunteers and subordinates. The extent to which the welfare of affected persons and those connected with them compared to those who are privileged by power and position will eventually be revealed. Sometimes those in authority may use the following adverse processes:

- Ensure absence of detail and avoid scrutiny

  Admit nothing; minimise everything. Cover up and conceal evidence, initiate no scrutiny of anything leaders have done. Remember those in power have access to more resources and so try to demote issues to avoid transparency and accountability.

- Ensure you allege weakness and accuse failure

  Explore and exploit the character of anyone who expresses concerns about any ecclesiastical behaviour. Profile them as lacking resilience or tolerance and claim their weaknesses are strengths. Maintain focus solely on their responses and not on any of leader's actions.

- Ensure you announce and advertise your self-declared success

  Claim you are restoring those who expressed concern while continuing to implement the above two processes. Communicate and celebrate this self-exalting presumed competence and achievement in pastoral ministry without explaining anything. Be confident about silencing their concerns and sustaining your focus on their alleged needs.

- Ensure you assume and ascribe friendship

  Assert and affirm friendship and affection as *the* basis for everything. Strictly avoid mentioning anything about power, position and profile. Claim credit for maintaining your contact and insist that any issues about which concern was expressed were *only* and were always *only* about relationships and hence

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[403] E.g., 'Faithfulness in Service,' Anglican Church of Australia, https://adelaideanglicans.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Faithfulness-In-Service-2017.pdf.

that hierarchical considerations were irrelevant – while also promoting your alleged caring ministry, and while avoiding scrutiny and alleging failure.

Escaping toxicity and avoiding trauma

Understanding and recognising the inversion principle

I call the above description of these sad realities the *inversion principle.* The four stages can be identified as *expunge*, *explore*, *exploit* and *explain*. They involve leaders and ruling groups

- defending themselves by deflecting and dismissing criticisms without collecting evidence. This may include defining pastoral issues as personal or organisational, or assigning them to another context.

- destroying and attacking the humanity and involvement of those who express concerns – as well as of those close to them by suffocating, stifling, suppressing and strangling any form of open communication.

- declaring they are helping and caring while manipulating, maligning, mangling and massacring reputations.

- declaring the person expressing concerns as a friend while treating them as an enemy and leaving them with apparently supportive statements that double as threats about taking as long as necessary to achieve their goals.

These transmogrifying reactions hurt and harm, and contrast transfigurative responses that bring healing and hope.

Attempting to respond to toxicity and avoiding further trauma

External professional counselling and support

Those experiencing this kind of toxicity may find it hard to reconstruct what happened, to find language to express their thoughts and to rebuild some type of meaningful future where they can know safety and security. Their challenges may be increased by the unwillingness of leaders in other contexts to give any form of public support. The *law* of ecclesiastical solidarity among ordained ministers and priests and licensed pastors may be found to be as fixed as the earlier stated rule about professional standards.

The following thoughts may help people encountering these difficulties. They are merely suggestions and are mentioned without claiming that they apply to any given situation. It is important to connect with external support and not remain isolated once the adverse agendas of previously trusted leaders become apparent.

Personal safety and well-being

I have found these steps to be worth memorising:

See the danger, *stop* moving towards the danger, remain *still*, *stay* calm, *step* back and go another way.

Once the leader's responses to expressions of concern about their or their colleague's unwelcome behaviour are found to be inadequate or inappropriate, those who have expressed concerns are faced with four options – all of which they may find difficult and disappointing:

- Stay and oppose the innuendos and accusations. This choice may be personally destructive and cause further problems: the issue may cease being the issue, with leaders focusing on the way recipients respond to the original issue rather than on what happened.

- Stay and ameliorate. This option may be appropriate for a while, but it may not be sustainable. It may lead to a win-win scenario, but it may also provide a reason for leaders to avoid issues. It may also leave long-term senses of failure and doubt by accentuating the original difficulties.

- Leave and oppose: This pathway increases the chances of being ignored and can increase frustration about failing to win reconciliation. Unless an acceptable independent context exists, this strategy may be unhelpful.

- Leave and accept the *reality* of what has taken place without agreeing to its *validity*. This alternative creates liminal space with increased vulnerability and calls for supported action in identifying new positive experiences in which fresh narratives about life away from the problem can flourish.

  Leaving this way enables fresh but painful realisations to emerge about previous events. What happened may have been worse than expected because trusted leaders acted to excluded subordinates from reasonable processes. It may also help create safe frameworks for re-engaging with the past should the other party engage in a meaningful reconciliation process.

Both leaving options involve decisions about whether detours are viable to achieve some rebuilding with some people in the relevant group or whether it is wisest to exit without deviation and with no rebuilding.

Find voice, have views and vote by doing

<u>Recognise</u>

One way of finding voice is to recognise when and where the *inversion principle* is operating. As mentioned, its presence and operation may be indicated by

- any absence of detail and avoidance of scrutiny.

- any accusations about your alleged weaknesses or failures.

- any announcing and advertising of presumed successful resolution.

- any assumptions about and ascriptions of friendship.

Similarly, finding voice may link with recognising false apologies and their associated perversion, diversion and inversion strategies by which

- little or no mention is made of any specific personal failure by the other party or personal change they are undertaking because of what occurred.

- emphasis is placed on what the recipient of unwelcome behaviour was allegedly thinking, or on any resultant alleged hurt experienced by the recipient, or on the recipient's changes in involvement.

- evidence of any supposed apology is framed in vague, ephemeral and euphemistic public statements about sorrow and regret.

- emphasis is placed on apparent friendship using imprecise language about being sure the recipient understands the leader's sorrow.

These four points again highlight ways the *inversion process* can be utilised to a leader's advantage.

Finding voice about these realities may not mean speaking with anyone in the community where unfortunate events occurred. It may mean being able to converse with external experts and empathetic people not in that group.

Reject, respond/reply and remove

Once the recipient finds words about the nature of what occurred, they can then articulate which of the options already suggested works best for them. Talking through these options may lead to the recipient being more able to

- *accept* the actuality of what happened, to *access* support in relation to this event (or these events) and to *achieve* a narrative

- *assign* a transition process away from adverse narratives that were determined and decreed from positions of power, privilege, prominence and prestige.

Review, reaffirm, rebuild

Further steps may include allocating time and energy to reaffirm and to rediscover ways in which the recipient can confidently and safely

- think and express their opinions.

- initiate mentioning and acting on their ideas.

- expect that those relating to them are in harmony with common values.

- stop to ensure they have times of adequate rest and refreshment.

Remember context

My experience suggests that environments where unwelcome behaviours occur are highly differentiated by power distancing: God up and man (male) down, man (male) up and women down, ordained and licensed leaders up and laypeople down, social and economic status up or down, vocational life up or down, religious background up or down, usefulness up or down, and (for parents) gender of children up or down.

Misreading Scripture and liturgy

Mimicking the macrocosm in a microcosm

The messages sent to me by too many ordained ministers (including ordained priests and licensed pastors) suggest they are often mimicking the macrocosm about God, creation and humanity in their microcosms. Their tacit and at times explicit narrative runs something like this …

> Since God is perfect, laypeople must recognise the church and its ministers as being perfect. Ministers, as divine agents in the microcosmic theatre called the church, must therefore never admit to doing anything wrong or that any of their colleagues have done anything wrong – even though intense conflict and competition occurs among them.

> Laypeople, as fallen humanity, are always wrong by default. Ministers, as demigods, are ordained to use a reward and punishment (prosperity and retribution) binary to enforce their authority. Blame and shame in this binary framework assists in creating emotional dependencies that can mask obvious power differentials. These dependencies may be called friendships and may be used to dominate on the basis that laypeople remain their friends if they do whatever their leaders demand (cf. John 15:14).

> This reward-punishment process uses power to offer hospitality, access and privilege or to enforce isolation, exclusion and servility. Ritual, rhetoric and reason may be used to generate various ecclesiastical *wow* experiences that minimise personal contact and which avoid direct pastoral ministry or responsibility unless it glorifies the leaders (and therefore supposedly praises church and God).

> Leaders may use dependency and profile to prey when laypeople pray, to take whatever is available when laypeople praise, pity and provide, and to promote themselves and give as little as possible in return.

> They may use their position to pronounce blessing while never admitting positional fault or blame. They may create and use personal and relational contexts when dealing with their own failure to mask any institutional corruption involved in any pastoral failure.

They can be expected to return to step one whenever possible. This may assist them in continuing to avoid their weaknesses and failures and in choosing self-defence and destruction rather than conceding or confirming anything authentic.

Minimising perceived distances between God and ministers while magnifying perceptions of differentiation between ministers and laypeople is central to efforts that mimic the macrocosm in a microcosm. This process can assist leaders in asserting that any of their apparently unwelcome actions were accidental or incidental, and that they did not involve long-term wilful, deliberate, intentional and calculated manipulation. This narrative may help them presume upon their position, profile, power, prominence and prestige.

Ministers playing this role may act like Job's comforters wanted to act – as rehabilitators in a divine drama where they are demigods and where laypeople are treated as being oblivious to deeper mysteries known to leaders and their privileged elites. Laypeople are then pressured to repent of their questioning about what is happening 'above' and 'over' them.

Reading Scripture *as a demigod* can create hideous versions of passages about God or Jesus …

> And *demigod* said, and it was so … And *demigod* created laypeople in *demigod's* own image (cf. Genesis 1).

> Why do the *laypeople* conspire and plot in vain against the LORD and his anointed *demigods*? They will tell of the decree of the LORD: 'You are my *demigods*, and you shall break the *laypeople* and dash them in pieces'. Now therefore, O *laypeople*, be wise; be warned, Serve the LORD's anointed *demigods* with fear, with trembling kiss their feet, or they will be angry, and you will perish in the way, for their wrath is quickly kindled (cf. Psalm 2).

> *Demigods*, you will ordain peace for *laypeople*, for indeed, all that *they* have done, you have done for *them*. O *demigods*, other lords besides you have ruled over *laypeople*, but *they* now acknowledge your name alone (cf. Isaiah 26).

> But the *demigods* are in their holy temples; let all *laypeople* keep silence before them (cf. Habakkuk 2)!

This pattern of thinking follows a liturgical framework for daily prayers and is aligned with that used for eucharistic services. Its frequent use creates a power

narrative in laypeople's minds and hearts which may generate dependant and subordinate dispositions towards their religious leaders.[404]

- The priest implicitly claims God's perfection as God's person.

- The priest's liturgy cannot proceed without insisting that laypeople are wrong and accept being shamed and blamed.

- The priest offers ritual, rhetoric, reason in declaring forgiveness, giving a homily, leading the eucharist and announcing a blessing.

- The priest pronounces blessing without confessing to the laypeople any personal shame or blame.

Ten decrees – ten demands

A further example of reading Scripture *as a demigod* is based on the ten words given to Moses. A microcosmic version of the leader's status and the laypeople's service could be shaped by the first five words. The final five words provide biblical guidance on core values, including in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

The leader's status

I am the leader appointed by the LORD your God, who ministers to you; you shall have no other leaders before me.

You shall not imagine me in ways I find unacceptable for I am a jealous leader and will do whatever it takes to address your false imaginations and to reward any of your affirming representations of me.

You shall not question, query or criticise me because I will not declare any one innocent who acts this way.

The laypeople's service

Remember to set aside your recreational time for assisting me in my ministry by helping organise and facilitate whatever goals I unilaterally declare. Remember that God said and it was, the God's spirit moved bringing form and fullness and that I'll need times of rest and recreation.

Honour your parents and care for your children while first helping me run the church.

Well-being and safety

You shall not resist me when I engage in predatory or parasitic relationships where, having more power than you or anyone else, I take advantage of you

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[404] *Book of Common Prayer*, (The Church of England, https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/book-of-common-prayer.aspx, 1662, 2006); *An Australian Prayer Book*, (Sydney, NSW: Anglican Information Office, 1978).

or anyone else while you or they are under my care and authority. You shall not view any of my relationship violations in terms of my power context.

You shall not resist me when I defame, demean, denigrate you or anyone else under my care and responsibility. Any character assassination, gaslighting, scapegoating, abuse, bullying and harassment that I do must not be identified or mentioned under any circumstances.

You shall not complain when I breach your or anyone's ethical, moral, spiritual or intellectual rights, especially you or anyone in subordinated positions. You shall not resist when I take advantage of you or anyone else to gain access to your or their TEEM or FEET.

You shall not object in any way when I bear false witness by concealing information or by constructing false narratives about you or anyone over whom I exercise leadership.

You shall not resist me when I seek to take advantage or claim authority over your or anyone else's spouse or family members, home or other possessions, or your vocations and recreational interests.

System lifecycles

Values

The last section included comments on toxicity and trauma. Communities and leaders wanting to avoid crises do well to understand that groups operate systemically, and that healthy leadership focuses on community welfare.

Biblical narratives are set in social and community contexts. Themes relating to exodus and exile involve the nation, as do narratives about prophets, priests and rulers. The Gospels mention the reign or kingdom of God not as a celestial realm but as a past, present and future terrestrial reality. John's Apocalypse concludes with God's new community fulfilling the Lord's prayer *on earth as it is in heaven.*

I believe people work better when they work together, and that communities are more effective and efficient in achieving their goals when and where

- they develop human capacity through learning communities.

- people exercise appropriate responsibility, accountability and transparency, and give public appreciation and recognition.

- relationships are characterised by collaboration, negotiation and respect.

- personal identity and integrity, decency and dignity are enhanced.

Seedtime and harvest

Creation as a system

Our lives are shaped by a wide variety of systems. The two Genesis creation accounts concern systems. Each day in the first narrative involves aspects of form and fullness with references to the way that day's creation rules by serving – helping – the next day(s) reach their goal of fruitfulness. The second account highlights this theme of helping in the shared relationship of the man and the woman. Their companionship and vocations are in the context of mutual help: they needed and delighted in each other's assistance and care.

These and other biblical metaphors can provide contextual narratives about the systems in which we live. They can help us identify where our lives intersect with a given system and determine our levels of connection and disconnection.

Grains of wheat …

Jesus' mention of grains of wheat in parables and signs, along with other Gospel stories, are accounts that highlight the difference between the grace that gives and the greed that grabs (e.g. John 12:20–26; Matthew 13:1ff).

Bread on waters …

The writer of Ecclesiastes urged people to send their bread out 'upon the waters, for after many days you will get it back' (Ecclesiastes 11:1; cf. Isaiah 55:1ff). This affirmation comes in a book that highlights transience and queries meaning. People are given a promise and urged to be patient amid life's uncertainty, futility and frailty.

Evening and morning …

Daybreak, dawn and fresh beginnings are recurrent themes from the Bible's first chapter to the last revelation. A psalm of David highlights this metaphor:

> My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast;
> I will sing and make melody.
> Awake, my soul! Awake, O harp and lyre!
> I will awake the dawn.
> I will give thanks to you, O LORD, among the peoples,
> and I will sing praises to you among the nations.
> For your steadfast love is higher than the heavens,
> and your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
> Be exalted, O God, above the heavens,
> and let your glory be over all the earth.
> Give victory with your right hand, and answer me,
> so that those whom you love may be rescued (Psalm 57:7–11).

Times and boundaries …

Paul's message to the Athenians was about certainty and security in seasons of conflict and struggle. God's offspring, according to Paul, best realise that the resurrection of Jesus sets the context for every human enterprise:

> The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring' (Acts 17:24–28).

Luke starts the book of Acts along the same lines, mentioning the reign of God, the Father's seasons and the Holy Spirit's enabling power – all bookended by Jesus' life, death, resurrection and his ascension (Acts 1:1–11).

Appreciating lifecycles

Strategies, responsibilities and risks

These metaphors can help provide insights into a given system's lifecycle. Each system has its own lifecycle and hence efforts to understand its lifecycle can assist in identifying strategies, responsibilities and risks. This process can assist in recognising issues by *exploring their context* and *determining their content*:

- Strategic intention and direction relate to a community's vision and purpose. Strategies relate to the system's purposes and goals. They answer *why* questions before considering *who*, *where*, *what* and *when.* The *how* question may be best left until these other questions are considered.

- Responsibilities focus actions that assist personal and group growth and wellbeing. Communities are intended to enable learning and maturity in whole of life situations. Keeping this goal in mind may help those in it from redefining the group and themselves negatively from the perspective of solving problems.

- Risk management and avoidance acknowledges the inevitably known and unknown challenges that the group and those in it will encounter. Clearly stated, publicly available and widely communicated conflict resolution processes are vital to a community's prosperity and stability.

Strategies, responsibilities and risks in Christian communities can be helpfully described for a group's activities in five areas. Documenting them can help identify priorities in the *now* as well as in the *next* timeframes. It can be beneficial for both *personal* and *community* settings.

Setting: Personal or Community		
Area	Now	Next
Theological learning		
Worshipful life		
Leadership collaboration		
Pastoral care and generosity		
Beyond boundaries compassion		

Exploring identity and activity

Defining the situation

Exploring *why* questions in the context of *now* and *next* for *people* and *communities* can help determine negotiated identities and activities in living situations. Crucial to these processes is an ongoing revisiting of the balance that is occurring between opportunities and difficulties. Growing and groaning both need recognition if realistic outcomes are to be achieved.

These explorations can help determine a *vision statement* as a shared rationale of common purpose based on clear and open communication.

Analysing preferred outcomes

Exploring *who* questions can expand this *vision statement* into an *outcomes* or *mission statement.* The word mission may be contentious for people who are aware of exploitation, manipulation and colonising by Christian missionaries.

The priority in this aspect of exploring identity and activity is to grow a situation aligned with the stated vision that achieves nominated strategies, matures and supports people engaged in working on these goals, and minimises related risks.

Suitable structures are essential for community life and need recognised *processes*, appropriate *products* (techniques and technologies) for the relevant tasks, and *people* working in safe and supported environments.

Designing and develop activities

Exploring *what*, *where* and *when* questions is best set in the context of a clear *vision* developed into publicly accepted *outcomes.* Activities designed and developed require clear *processes* which help *produce* the nominated outcomes.

Implementing planned activities

Exploring *how* questions highlights the details involved in implementing these planned activities. This stage is not simply robotic or mechanical as it involves *remaining alert* and *expecting the unexpected* while *looking ahead and behind*.

Reviewing achievements

Reviewing what happened can significantly enrich and enhance what occurs in the future. Two simple questions worth the time, effort, energy and expertise needed to gain some evidence-based answers are '*what did we do*' and '*what do we think about what we did*'.

Knowledge, change and innovation[405]

Group leadership involving different expertise

Churches and related organisations can benefit from leadership models that are inclusive of expertise beyond ministry and theology. Education, law, information technologies, counselling and related disciplines, and other disciplines are vital aspects that enrich and enable community growth and improvement. Self-titled paradigms about *biblical* counselling, education and leadership may be designed to reinforce values and beliefs that would be unrecognisable to the original writers and editors and the recipients of these ancient texts. Monochrome, autocratic, ecclesiastical structures may stifle the creative life that can come from collaborative and cooperative leadership.

Knowledge facilitation and community learning

Context-specific knowledge in communities is often tacit and local to the group, shaping its culture. Hierarchically dominant constructs can shrink the culture while inclusive and collaborative ones can help it flourish. While minimal levels of knowledge about the culture are needed for a community to exist, extra layers of knowledge determine a community's viability and differentiation – and therefore the extent to which it will thrive in competitive environments.

Knowledge is best understood as dynamic and as an essential component that enables a community to learn about itself and so implement its vision more successfully. Reflective knowledge can help a community recognise what it needs to learn and do to be the group it hopes to become.

This type of learning connects with a community's needs to be aware of what similar communities are thinking and planning. External knowledge can encourage innovation and appropriate change while groups that focus on their own culture may be more cautious and reluctant about embracing change.

These insights highlight the benefits of communities investing in strategies that assist their learning. Better learning is likely to be more beneficial than greater knowledge. The ability to make tacit cultural narratives explicit and open is central to strategic learning and creation of group knowledge. Tacit knowledge is more than detail about processes within the group, it concerns the group's understanding of itself and its values, beliefs and ways of working.

These expressions of understanding are digested in the community and become part of its culture as tacit behaviours inform tacit knowledge, and tacit knowledge becomes explicit knowledge. This process will prosper in cultures that provide

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[405] Cf. Priest, *Effective and Innovative Educational Leadership Relating to Implementing Digital Technologies in Schools*; *Assignments: Master of Education (Leadership and Management)* (2013).

participants – and not just leaders – with significance, meaning and positive opportunities by being involved in shared activities that have intentional purpose.

Innovation in and by communities

Innovation is more likely to occur where there are safe and carefully articulated processes that are locally implemented and externally recognised. Clear vision statements that are consistently operational and suitably resourced encourage volunteers to identify their own skills and share in meaningful and creative activities. They also help identify risks and concerns and suggest ways in which they may be reduced or eliminated.

People with externally developed expertise who identify with the local culture can provide education and training for those lacking their background. They can assist in increasing sustainability and in facilitating community reviews.

Leaders – especially those who perceive their power to come from ministry and theological roles – may find the creativity and innovation that is naturally generated by these people and their groups to be threatening and outside of their milieu and experience. Clashes between inertia and innovation can damage or destroy otherwise viable communities and lead to toxic and trauma inducing outcomes for those affected. Poor risk management can cause stagnation, which leads to shrinking activity and stifling of opportunity.

Pacing and embracing change are vital elements for community leaders who realise that their well-being and the group's prosperity both require positive change and new experiences. Rather than enforcing their own agendas, leaders can embrace the innovations of the group and work collaboratively and cooperatively to facilitate their inclusion in the group's culture. This strategic leadership can help minimise crises and enhance creativity.

Improving community culture

Cultural change is inevitable. Participants or observers may ask whether changes improve or hinder the community's life from these perspectives:

• People and power

    Different forms of power function in communities and different people and groups have different levels of influence. Accurate and informed perceptions can encourage trust and confidence. They can also facilitate positive changes and help resolve conflicts. Power that rewards rather than criticises, that collaborates rather than acts coercively, and that encourages expertise rather than promotes servility will be beneficial to the community.

    Leaders using power effectively understand and use decision-making processes to enhance the aspirations and responsibilities of those involved in the group who are seeking to help achieve agreed goals.

- Structure and process

  Leaders concerned about more than order, control and discipline – or authority, hierarchy and accountability – may more successfully energise participants, encourage creativity and improve morale. This kind of leadership is aware that achieving better outcomes involves prioritising cooperation and collaboration ahead of coercion and control.

  These leaders recognise that management alone is not enough, and that leadership involves people and relationships as well as managing processes. They focus on creating community culture, promoting collaboration and designing processes that give opportunities, engage expertise, remove barries, encourage development and provide help.

- Culture and environment

  Leaders who can encourage and be sensitive to culture as a learning environment will see more than cycles of events and activities. They will anticipate uncertainty and accept that it can be beneficial rather than react to changes and seek to enforce rigidity.

  These leaders will prioritise hospitality ahead of promoting themselves as heroes – hospitality of people and their ideas, concerns and responses. They will be aware of and open about their own limitations.

Achieving beneficial change involves people, processes and products. It means recognising shared assumptions and values and the way the community adapts and integrates to its own culture and its external environment. It includes understanding that innovation means disruption and best occurs by prioritising well-being and boundaries.

Wise leaders know that sudden changes rather than ones that are phased in or trialled as pilot initiatives can prove most dysfunctional and disruptive. They understand that changes surface tacit cultural beliefs and make forms of behaviour that may need modification explicit. They recognise that growth is most likely where questioning, creative thinking and fresh possibilities are discussed and that avoiding and covering up concerns only generates barriers. They will also be alert to the dangers of group-thinking and identity-rigidity.

Theological frameworks[406]

Theological frameworks can help Christian communities review and revise their aspirations and attitudes without down-grading to reductionist cliches. They can assist in encouraging participation along agreed pathways that include laypeople researching and sharing as well as in listening to more formal dissertations and

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[406] See *Educational, Social and Theological Themes in Proverbs 1–9*; *Assignments: Master of Theological Studies*, vol. 1, (2014); ibid., 2; Priest, *Living in Love and Freedom*; *Learning to Love Wisdom*, .

sermonising. These frameworks may include primary and secondary themes, such as those in the example listed below:

Who God is and what God does

God's creational purposes and restorative covenant promises

Reflect on the ways God is good, love, holy, true and righteous and ways in which these qualities flow to humanity and all creation by God being gracious and merciful as peace-giver and peace-forgiver and reconciler.

God's triune person and God's purposes and actions

Reflect on the ways God is Father and King; Son, Lord and Messiah; and Spirit and Lord. Reflect on the ways God as triune achieves God's creational purposes and restorative covenant promises.

Who God's people are and what God's people do

Perspectives

Reflect on the ways

- God's persons and relationships impact our lives as God's people.

- God's works and actions impact our lives as God's people.

Reflect on the ways God's throne of grace informs our perceptions of God as the giver of grace rather than as legalistic judge.

Reflect on the ways our unique, personal

- beings and relationships can live more in and by faith, hope and love and provide further encouragement rather than attempting to survive on our own amid other people's condemnations and criticisms.

- works and actions can increasingly occur in and by faith, hope and love and provide further encouragement rather than attempting to survive on our own amid other people's condemnations and criticisms.

Equilibrium in life

Reflect on the ways our

- vocational lives interact with our families and improve our homes.

- re-creative activities interact with our families and improve our homes.

- relationships interact with our families and improve our homes.

Blessed are the peacemakers

Peacemaking

Authentic peacemaking is not neutrality or objectivity. True peacemaking identifies concerns and involves people. Effective peacemakers participate in appropriate reconciliation processes. Making peace impacts on everyone involved and is never an individual, solo event. It is not a hidden matter done by oneself. It concerns two parties. It is at least bilateral and not unilateral. Those who are seen to have behaved inappropriately (doers) and those who believe they have experienced unwelcome behaviours (recipients) may belong to the same group.[407] Doers may have position, profile, power, prestige and prominence not afforded to recipients.

True peacemaking is public in some form. While it may be possible to resolve issues without external observers, reconciliation may include some form of third-party validation and testimony. This may involve a witness or witnesses selected by each party and require additional mediation. It is unlikely that ignoring requests for witnesses or mediation helps achieve reconciliation.

If doers want reconciliation, they will not abdicate their responsibilities to other parties and avoid scrutiny of their own actions. Involvement by third parties needs to respect power differentials and include appropriate accountability. Avoiding and denying mutual responsibilities may exacerbate the consequences of the original behaviours. Recipients need to be aware that the impact on them of a reconciliation process may prove to be greater than the original unwelcome behaviour. Belief biases in communities may serve to protect doers and disadvantage recipients, increasing difficulties in reconciliation processes.

Various parties can be peacemakers, including doers, recipients, other leaders, independent people with influence, and community members. Peacemaking may have collateral damage for those closely connected to the peacemaker, such as the peacemaker's family and friends. Unexpected consequences may involve intentional and unintentional actions taken by doers or those aligned with them. While the benefits that flow from being peacemakers might be innate to the action of peacemaking, appreciating these benefits may involve recognising difficulties.

Silence and perceived impartiality may reinforce the views of those in positions of power and maintain an organisation's inertia. This adds to the problems that recipients may experience in power relationships which have gone awry. Doers may use their position and profile to publish and promote information that looks

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[407] For the sake of readability, the terms 'doers' and 'recipients' are used without 'alleged', but this does not imply any sense of agreement may exist about events that have occurred. 'Doers' and 'recipients' are used rather than 'perpetrators' or 'victims', as those words may seem unnecessarily judgemental.

innocuous but reinforces their views and conceals their actions. True peacemaking can therefore be disruptive by challenging perceived and actual authority.

True peacemaking involves recognition by both parties that there is a problem, and mutual acceptance that there is an issue requiring resolution. It negotiates acceptable processes that legitimise the voices of both parties. It establishes a safe place for respectful and honest conversation where the person with greater power does not pull rank. Concerns are more likely to be handled in a calm and non-accusative manner in this setting. Appropriate actions can be negotiated that may create a safe and trusted environment for any future relationship where conflicts are effectively resolved.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is not reconciliation. It is personal and personally restorative. It alters the attitude of recipients towards doers. It involves and includes judgements by recipients regarding inappropriate and unwelcome behaviours. Someone can only be forgiven for what is considered faulty. Forgiveness looks for reconciliation, restoration and renewal while accepting that these outcomes may never eventuate.

Forgiveness does not mean recipients must try to achieve reconciliation but opens ways through the 'valley of shadows' that bring acceptance about what occurred while disagreement remains over the legitimacy of what took place. Forgiveness ignores, dismisses and forgets what happened in terms of vengeance, vindictiveness and recrimination. Forgiveness does not bypass or go over 'the valley of shadows'; it travels through it. Forgiveness arrives at a place of renewal and festivity that is not spiteful, even though the presence of accusations and nastiness may continue.

Peace in the presence of God in God's creation as a refuge and sanctuary can be at least a parallel experience as new realities enlighten and enrich and make memories of past events less intense.[408] Times of serenity can assist in facing the consequences of what has taken place more openly, honestly and realistically. Dialogue with the party that is seen as having acted wrongly may or may not be possible, as appropriate boundaries are needed and the other party may refuse suggested reconciliation processes.

Forgiveness may acknowledge that God, as the true peacemaker, brings reconciliation by the Holy Spirit through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Forgiveness can help release recipients from the negative self-talk that suffocates them spiritually and relationally as they attempt to make sense of what occurred. Forgiveness can assist in opening supportive relationships with wise friends and counsellors who can empathise without necessarily agreeing, and who can give helpful insights regarding necessary protective or legal action. Forgiveness can help avoid seeing mercy and judgement as opposites. True mercy involves restorative

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[408] Cf. Psalm 23.

justice. True justice is not vengeful or bitter and seeks mercy. And true mercy and justice include authentic truth telling.

Reconciliation

Cover-ups, concealment and covert behaviour can accentuate and reinforce perceived and actual unwelcome and inappropriate behaviours. Forgiveness may or may not lead to reconciliation, but it can help minimise deprecating, demeaning self-talk where recipients denigrate and diminish themselves because of their own alleged, apparent and actual failures, and where they are themselves isolated, disengaged and marginalised. This negative self-talk may be amplified if recipients remain in communities where the leadership includes doers who worsen matters by refusing or ending reconciliation processes. Conversation between people with honest, open and accountable hearts brings reconciliation. Recipients may not have failed if reconciliation does not occur.

The Lord's prayer says forgive as we have been forgiven. God's forgiveness has not yet achieved reconciliation with everyone, even though that is God's goal. 'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one' may include protection from destructive self-conversations and self-blame. This prayer may include requests to be kept from being tempted that one has failed when reconciliation does not happen, and that recipients are delivered from unforgiving people. It may mean asking for strength to be open to reconciliation, while seeking help from being consumed by what occurred and overwhelmed by past events. 'For [God's] is the kingdom' where streams flow in deserts, where cut-down stumps produce new shoots, and where kind ravens feed weary pilgrims.

Forgiveness, reconciliation, restitution, confession, conviction and repentance are different and significant. Reconciliation involves truth and has a public presence. Transparency needs to be commensurate with the nature of wronged behaviour and to accommodate the concerns of recipients. It is wise to be alert to doers who claim to provide restoration without submitting to independent third parties.

Rethinking community and ministry

Kevin N. Giles: *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians*[409]

Giles wrote this book because he saw minimal correlation between ministry and leadership in first century churches and its almost universal understanding and practice today. He recognised that this contrast exists in the context of the adaptions made by early churches to the different situations that they faced.[410]

Giles statess that these early communities were small and met in people's homes. Some leaders had oversight of several home-based groups while other leaders were locally based or more mobile, with these different types of leaders ministering alongside each other.

The Gospels, according to Giles, are silent about anything Jesus said about institutional ways in which Christians would meet, other than emphasising that it would be in the context of the reign of God, the forgiveness of sins and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Constituting and instituting are different activities, and Jesus' insistence that leaders were not to rule or seek honour but to serve with humility was revolutionary. Voluntarily washing subordinates' feet was without contemporary parallel, as was Jesus' inclusion of women in the patriarchal setting in which he lived without subordinating, denigrating or demeaning them. Shepherds were to model themselves as goodness displayed in sacrifice rather than greatness derived from servility or slavery.[411]

Giles commences his analysis of New Testament and post-apostolic writings about bishops, deacons, elders, apostles, prophets and teachers by looking at Pauline correspondence. He highlights Paul's use of servant language and Paul's self-references as a slave, along with Paul's early understandings of leadership and ministry as charismatic and Spirit-initiated while also involving some institutional structures. Spiritual gifts were to be exercised in the context of local assemblies where love, service, mutual submission, care, compassion, peaceful living, good actions, forgiveness, teaching and truth-telling were to be evident. Judgementalism, malice, envy and competition were to be excluded.

The middle Pauline letters emphasise that maturity was to be encouraged and enabled by apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers. The narrative in the late Pauline epistles appears to marginalise women while charismatic ministry 'fades into the background and all attention falls on the office bearers'.[412]

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[409] Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians*.

[410] Ibid., Preface, also 1.

[411] Ibid., 26ff: Giles provides an excursus on Jesus and women which explores Jesus' relationships with women as his disciples, as apostles to the apostles and as marriage partners.

[412] Ibid., 40.

Giles second excursus about women focuses on 'women leaders in the early and undisputed Paulines'[413] After nominating differences between Paul's era and our own, Giles states that

> Paul's *theology* of ministry excludes any division of the body of Christ into male and female. In Christ, men remain men and women remain women, but the Spirit is non-discriminatory in bestowing the charismata. This non-discriminatory bestowal of gifts is the foundational premise of Paul's theology of mission.[414]

Giles then outlines his view that Paul's ministry *practice* in house church settings reflected this *theology.*

Turning to New Testament references to bishops, Giles reasons that house church leaders were bishops or deacons and that elders were 'communal leaders'. He concludes that it follows that there were women bishops in the apostolic age but notes that when Christian gatherings moved from homes to larger buildings that 'women were almost universally barred from leadership and silenced in church'.[415]

The word group describing deacons was first used to indicate that leaders were to lead by serving. It then grew to profile 'notable leaders … and finally some people who it seems were associate leaders of house churches'.[416]

Giles discusses elders 'in the light of their Jewish antecedents' and concludes they were community leaders and *not* prototypes of modern ministers or pastors. Some may have had teaching ministries because of their status and knowledge. Christian elders emerged a while after the community leadership of Peter and the other apostles. Elders may have also been house church leaders or bishops. Nonetheless, elders differed from bishops, they were not sole pastors of congregations, nor were 'bishops appointed for towns'.[417]

Before presenting a summary of his conclusions in table form, Giles outlines some of his main conclusions regarding church leadership that he sees as being relevant in our current circumstances.

- Church leadership should be plural and therefore shared.

- Church leadership should be diverse and include those with oversight and those who 'are ministers of the word'.

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[413] Ibid., 41ff.

[414] Ibid., 42.

[415] Ibid., 56, 63, 64.

[416] Ibid., 94.

[417] Ibid., 114.

- Local churches should be under the oversight of church leaders who represent 'the church at large'.[418]

Apostles are defined by Giles as those sent by God. He links the Greek word for apostles with the Hebrew term for 'commissioned agent'.[419] The writer of Hebrews identified Jesus as an apostle (Hebrews 3:1), a conclusion consistent with the way Jesus is described in the Gospels. The Gospel authors placed significance on there being twelve disciples, with their apostolic calling more fully described after his resurrection.

Luke nominated Paul as an apostle even though he did not fit Luke's definition in Acts 1:21, 22. Paul is described by Luke as doing the same kind of things as Peter, as having had a vision of the risen Christ, as being given a unique commission and as being an authentic witness like the original twelve.

After comparing other New Testament references to apostles, including by Paul and Peter, Giles notes the apostolic nature of the women to whom Jesus first appeared as the risen Messiah. Giles opposes Roman Catholic and so-called complementarian arguments that women are not to be ordained because Jesus' twelve disciples were men.

Prophets and prophecy are seen by Giles as important in the apostolic era. However, modern usage of these terms may have little correlation with the way these words were used at that time.[420] Old Testament prophets included women and were primarily forth-tellers, rather than foretellers, in declaring judgement or salvation. The Gospel writers describe Jesus as a prophet and a teacher who spoke with authority. Luke saw prophecy as important, as linked with the Holy Spirit and as being associated with specific men and women who also provided leadership. Prophecy is also pivotal in the book of Revelation.

The early Pauline writings give prominence to prophecy in the context of house church gatherings where prophecies could be readily discussed. Ephesians mentions apostles and prophets as being significant in the foundation of the church, in the revelation of the mystery of Christ and as a leadership group. The pastoral letters focus on faithfulness to the traditions, sound teaching and trustworthy leadership.

Giles' summary of his research includes his view that prophecy and teaching may overlap or be distinct, that prophets were to be tested by their message and behaviour, that men and women received the Spirit and so were prophets and prophesied and that pressures from false teaching along with more institutional forms marginalised these ministries.

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[418] Ibid., 121. Cf. 126: Giles' table outlines three stages of early church leadership development.

[419] Ibid., 130.

[420] Ibid., 150. Giles nominates six 'dogmatic or popular understandings of prophecy'.

The New Testament links rather than separates preaching and teaching and identifies them as being about experiential knowledge. While Jesus' identity as a teacher was to a commonly recognised category, teaching is also mentioned as applying to all of Jesus' followers. Teachers as a category are not often nominated concerning the early churches and their ministry is seen as being associated with pastors and prophets.[421]

Giles concludes his book by discussing ordination. He believes that in the early churches, hands were placed on people for specific ministries that had limited duration rather than for permanent offices. The twelve disciples, other apostles and bishops are not described as being ordained or as ordaining and Jesus never commands ordination.

Giles identifies ordination as a third century development consistent with Roman hierarchical social orders. Identifying clergy as priests who led the eucharist followed, with Catholic theologians later stating that 'in ordination "the character of the soul" was altered'.[422] Clergy were therefore categorised as a social elite who were legitimised by their authority and power to *absolve* sins, *bless* laypeople and *conduct* the eucharist.

Giles believes modern ordination needs theological reconstruction as it lacks biblical substantiation and usually excludes women with leadership abilities.

Philip Jenkins: *The Lost History of Christianity*[423]

My early interest in Eastern Orthodoxy grew by reading Deno Geanakopolos' *Byzantine East and Latin West*.[424] Contacts with Christian workers in various settings helped encourage further reading about Indigenous, Latin American, Indian subcontinent, Middle Eastern, African and Asian Christianity.

Books by Judith Herrin,[425] Simon Montefiore[426] and Richard Fidler[427] have deepened my appreciation and respect for Eastern Orthodoxy and the non-Roman churches in African, Asian and Middle Eastern cultures.

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[421] Ibid., 195–216 is an excursus in which Giles argues that 1 Timothy 2:12 should be seen as an exception rather than a universal endorsement.

[422] Ibid., 231.

[423] Jenkins, *Lost History of Christianity, The*.

[424] Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West*.

[425] Judith Herrin, *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire* (London, England: Penguin Books, 2008); *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium*.

[426] Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Jerusalem: The Biography* (London, Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, an imprint of Orion Books, 2011).

[427] Richard Fidler, *Ghost Empire* (Sydney, NSW: ABC Books, 2016).

Jenkins documented the millennium of Middle Eastern, African and Asian church life and the way it declined and substantially disappeared. These churches had close cultural and linguistic connections with early Christianity and the communities in which Jesus lived and ministered. Many of their beliefs about God and Scripture were aligned with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox doctrines but their understandings of Jesus' person differed. Were Jesus' humanity and divinity 'conjoined or comingled', were they 'not absolutely united in the mystical sense' and did he have 'only one nature' with the divine overwhelming the human? In what ways did political, social and religious priorities determine the events of the millennium after the early church councils?[428]

Christianity, according to Jenkins, was a 'tricontinental religion' until well into the fourteenth century. He reasons that no religion is safe if these churches could fall 'into such oblivion'. Around 780, Bishop Timothy was 'arguably … more influential than the Western pope, in Rome, and on a par with the Orthodox patriarch in Constantinople'. Jenkins describes the Nestorian and Jacobite churches as 'two great transnational churches' whose life was very different to the 'so-called Dark Ages' elsewhere. [429]

Jenkins' case is that Nestorian, Jacobite and Orthodox Christians provided very substantial cultural achievements which were adopted by and are now attributed to Muslim Arab scholarship. He goes on to describe a 'brutal purge of Christianity, most spectacularly in Asia [that] left Europe as the geographical heart of the Christian faith'.[430]

This purge left Christianity substantially without deep roots in its originating culture – unlike modern Islam. Jenkins claims that, 'in this sense, Christianity had no heart, no natural core' – no homeland.[431] In seeking to identify which churches were able to survive in some form, Jenkins concludes that those with deepest connections with their local communities fared best. He differentiates between those that became native and those that were colonial.

He refers to crypto-Christianity as 'a distinctively Christian phenomenon' where their faith is largely hidden from the social and political establishment.

After his record of the story of churches in these Middle Eastern, Asian and African locations, Jenkins reflects on what their demise means, and on what can be learnt from these events. He asks the 'Where is God in this?' question and whether it can be simply assigned to human and geographical factors.

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[428] Jenkins, *Lost History of Christianity, The.*, ix, x.

[429] Ibid., 3–7.

[430] Ibid., 18, 24.

[431] Ibid., 25, 26, cf. 28.

Meaning and purpose anticipate more than chaotic and random sequences. Jenkins sees a need for 'a theology of extinction', especially when expectations of successful missionary activity are so strongly endorsed. If reversals and annihilation indicate that 'Christianisation … is not an inevitable process, nor a one-way road', then some informed understanding is required.[432]

One scenario is that decline occurred because of disobedience; that failure and fault led to divine abandonment and punishment, partly given to warn other communities about their shortcomings. Some might endorse these views because of their doctrinal differences with the Middle Eastern, Asian and African churches. This analysis, according to Jenkins, fails to understand sufferings experienced by Catholic and Orthodox churches and does not make sense of God's care and goodness when severe and brutal persecution occurs.

Jenkins suggests what he considers is a better approach. Human timelines and geographies suggest that churches may be regarded as extinct when they may have been forcibly relocated and that they may one day return to their previous locations. He cites Chinese church history as an example of where successive establishment efforts seemed to end in ruin before new enterprises saw fresh growth and renewal. Our categories of *extinction* and *forever* may be part of the problem. Even failures leave some form of memory for future communities.

A further option is based on Christian, Jewish and Muslim concepts of God's involvement in history. Political and social factors in this context are not the only ones that need to be considered. Our inability to understand what has happened does not necessarily mean that everything is incomprehensible. God's lack of favouritism for one creed may signify deeper realities about God's world and non-Christian faiths including Islam and Buddhism. There may be more to human narratives than another religion being a

> scourge that God applies to faithless Christians. … Might Christians someday accept that Islam fulfils a positive role, and that its growth in history represents another form of divine revelation, one that complements but does not replace the Christian message.[433]

Jenkins argues that realignment has occurred from supersessionist views of Judaism to ones that use the Hebrew Bible instead of Old Testament.

These three alternative perspectives lead Jenkins to wonder whether the wrong questions are being asked, and whether measuring a religion's success by its 'political and cultural hegemony' or its military capacity is fundamentally floored. His reminder that the New Testament never promised relief from worldly hostility

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[432] Ibid., 249, 250.

[433] Ibid., 258. Cf. Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York, New York, USA: Harper Collins, 2011); *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation.*

or indicated ongoing spiritual prosperity. The miracles and mysteries are in the quality of Christian witness that has occurred in the wide range of circumstances where churches have existed and continue to be found:

> The more we study the catastrophes and endings that befell individual churches in particular eras, the better we appreciate the surprising new births that Christianity achieves. …
>
> Losing the ancient churches is one thing, bust losing their memory and experience so utterly is a disaster scarcely less damaging. To break the silence, we need to recover those memories, to restore that history.[434]

George G. Hunter III: *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again*[435]

My reading about Western Christianity included books on Christian history that were dominated by English perspectives including by John Foxe, F. F. Bruce, J. C. Ryle, Arnold Dallimore and Iain Murray.[436] Nick Needham's extensive series includes sections on European history and Eastern Orthodoxy while Anne Hunt's *Insights from the Mystics* provided chapters on significant women.[437] Ruben Angelici's book translates the writings of Richard of St Victor.[438]

Books on Asahel Nettleton by Bennet Tyler and Andrew Bonar, and J. F. Thornbury provided helpful background to evangelicalism in eastern areas of the United States of America.[439]

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[434] Jenkins, *Lost History of Christianity, The*, 261, 262.

[435] Hunter III, *Celtic Way of Evangelism, The: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again*.

[436] John Foxe, *Foxe's Christian Martyrs of the World* (Uhrichsville, Ohio, USA: Barbour, 1989); Bruce, *Spreading Flame, The*.J. C. Ryle, *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1978); *Five English Reformers* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1981); George Whitefield and J.C. Ryle, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1997); Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon* (Edinburgh, UK: Moody Press, 1988); Iain Murray, *Forgotten Spurgeon, The* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1986).

[437] N. R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power: Part One* (London, England: Grace Publications, 1998); *2000 Years of Christ's Power: Part Three* (London, England: Grace Publications, 2000); *2000 Years of Christ's Power: Part Two* (London, England: Grace Publications, 2004); *2000 Years of Christ's Power: Volume 4* (London, England: Grace Publications, 2016); *2,000 Years of Christ's Power Vol. 5: The Age of Enlightenment and Awakening* (London, England: Grace Publications, 2023); Hunt, *Trinity, The: Insights from the Mystics*

[438] Ruben Angelici and Richard of Saint Victor, *Richard of Saint Victor on the Trinity*, trans. Ruben Angelici (Eugene, Oregon, USA: Cascade Books, 2011).

[439] J. F. Thornbury, *God Sent Revival* (Darlington, Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1988); Bennet Tyler and Andrew Bonar, *Life and Labours of Asahel Nettleton, The* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth, 1975).

Hunter mentions Vincent Donovan when discussing Celtic Christianity's care for those in their own and in other communities.[440] Roland Allen, Jens Christensen and Max Hart are concerned with western missionary approaches.[441]

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Hunter describes the context in which he wrote his book as one where western civilisation was not only more 'secular, urban, postmodern, and neobarbarian' but one in which evangelicalism had diminished credibility. He believed most western church leaders still work on 1950s approaches where insights beyond Roman and reformation movements are usually disregarded and ignored.

He describes Patrick as believing God reveals God's-self through nature, as connecting with his captor's language and culture, and as identifying with them and wanting them to be reconciled to God. Patrick's approach contrasts with Roman Christian leaders who expected to civilize people into their culture and language so they could Christianise them to their own paradigms and practices.

These Roman leaders categorised those who with whom this approach proved unsuccessful as barbarians and excluded them from where Roman Christianity dominated. The cultural distance between Celts and this Roman approach was significant. The Celts accepted paradoxical ideas more readily and prioritised openness and wellbeing. Their churches, in being significantly indigenous, emphasised imagination, creation and God's triune immanence and providence. Their monastic communities were structured to engage with people rather than withdraw from them and mainly comprised laypeople. Those connected with them were involved in a wide range of vocational activities and shared times of worship and contemplative prayer.

Hunter identifies that this approach focused on a realm between empirical and transcendent levels – on a middle-level where people seek to resolve their concerns about present crises, past difficulties and upcoming unexpected and unfortunate events:

> A folk Christianity of, by, and for the people … helped common people live and cope as Christians day by day in the face of poverty, enemies, evil forces, nature's uncertainties, and frequent threats. … This folk Christianity can be seen today in the people's prayers and blessings that were passed on orally for many generations.[442]

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[440] Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*.

[441] Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods, St Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 1962); *Spontaneous Expansion of the Church, The* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Eerdmans Publishing, 1962); Jens Christensen, *Mission to Islam and Beyond* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 2001); Max Hart, *A Story of Fire* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1988).

[442] Hunter III, *Celtic Way of Evangelism, The: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again.*, 20.

While describing the impact of Celtic Christianity in helping Europe emerge from the so-called Dark Ages, Hunter identifies five aspects of the Celtic communities: belonging, being compassionate and encouraging participation, engaging in imaginative prayer in all settings, practising hospitality, and inviting belief. This approach was the reverse of the Roman strategy of presentation to others, decisions for others, and participation by others only according to Roman rules. Believing followed rather than preceded belonging.[443]

Hunter analyses this theme, highlighting the importance of a communicator's ethos and the need for identification with those who are expected to listen. He sees the qualities of the Celtic approach in what they achieved and profiles their emphasis on intuition, emotion, imagination and experience by creatively using art, music and poetry. Hunter contrasts this with an approach that focuses on logic, concepts, abstraction, language and rationality. He states that:

> By the eleventh century their culturally relevant movement had adapted Christianity to the language and culture of many different Celtic and Germanic peoples; indeed, the number of cultural adaptations that the movement managed was unprecedented.[444]

Adaptation involved applying biblical revelation to rather than imposing it on local contexts. This indigenising principle and process included using local languages and music. Patrick's emphasis on incarnational and trinitarian theologies contrasted the Roman focus on God's oneness and transcendence. Similarly, the death of Christ was represented as God not being capricious or manipulative but as loving and liberating – as God dying for them rather than demanding that they sacrificed to God. The Celtic reverence for creation also differed from the detached and utilitarian views of the Roman church. These themes meant they were optimistic about being created in God's image, that this image, although defective, had not been destroyed by sin and evil.

Having outlined his views of Celtic and Roman Christianity, Hunter reflects on what can be learned from his explorations. He outlines the different approaches to conformity, language and literacy, and the contrasting expectations that exist about pre-Christian people being expected to become like those already in churches.

He believes that Celtic Christianity's 'alternative version of Christianity' was basically a lay movement that had its own beliefs, focused on community life, adapted to its cultural context, connected using teams, and prioritised belonging ahead of believing. He believes its whole of life focus means it was more than a form of spirituality and that it was other person centred.

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[443] Ibid., 36ff.

[444] Ibid.., 72.

Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer: *A Church called Tov: Forming a goodness culture that resists abuses of power and promotes healing*[445]

The authors' acknowledgements set the scene for the profile of what a culture of goodness looks like and of the distresses that might be expected in those who resist abuses of power by church leaders. Their final thoughts are that churches focused on goodness will work intentionally together to be more like Jesus. They will create space for creative Spirit-led activities and include everyone in discerning ways that the Holy Spirit can grow goodness in their community. They will read the Bible together and learn what God is leading them to do as they cooperate with other churches in eradicating toxicity.

McKnight and Barringer commence their discussion about creating a goodness culture by stating that choosing churches involves selecting cultures and being shaped by those cultures. Goodness, they insist, is, gospel aligned, evident in a community's generosity and seen in the ways it opposes toxicity. Pastors, leaders and everyone in the church can learn goodness in action from Jesus' approachability, compassion and humility.

The authors use a diagrammatic metaphor of *a circle of tov* in developing their understanding of a culture of goodness.

• Nurturing empathy involves resisting narcissism.

They list eleven groups of vulnerable people, including women, who may experience systemic discrimination from male-dominated cultures and so need compassion and empathy. A goodness focused community will provide them with opportunities to be visible, listened to and believed, and to share their stories and any cases of abuse.

This goodness culture will also proactively and appropriately profile the names and stories of women from the Bible, church history and their own community in ways that recognise their vocational contributions to society and church communities.

• Nurturing grace includes resisting fear generating behaviours.

Grace-filled churches reject any type of 'power based, fear-inducing, exploitative culture', especially when it abuses women, engages in verbal shaming or exploits people that leaders are expected to serve. Grace-based communities, by contrast, have trust-base, truth-centred sibling-type relationships that 'are built on reciprocity'.[446]

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[445] McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing.*

[446] Ibid., 118.

These communities develop gift-oriented cultures that enable growth in relationships and encourage action without hierarchical power declaring some people as more important than others. This environment 'turns our siblingship into a flourishing family reality' in which the Holy Spirit changes enemies into friends through forgiveness as everyone is recognised as recipients of God's redemptive gifts in Jesus Christ.[447]

- Prioritising people means resisting organisational ambitions.

Being a people-first church includes avoiding male-centred and anti-female attitudes. It shuns protecting the institution and its leadership at the expense of those in the community who might be damaged by malpractice or abuse. It actively recognises everyone as being created in God's image, treats them as siblings and looks at them in ways seen in the biblical Jesus stories.

Treating people as people means relationships are genuine and names, histories and stories are known and accepted. It involves being caring and trusting in ways that facilitate mutual belonging and gift recognition. It develops behaviours and beliefs that assist groups being people-first rather than system-driven.

- Telling the truth involves resisting false narratives.

Resisting 'lying, deceit, cover-ups, suppression, gaslighting [and] spin' is central to forming a truth-telling culture.[448] Christian faith is about the truth that is in Jesus and so does the truth, surrenders to the truth, opposes false narratives and listens to and treats those who report abuse with respect and dignity. It acts knowing that reconciliation includes confession and repentance and so identifies and clarifies truth-telling.

The authors invite churches to create and pray litanies that affirm truth-tellers, identify perpetrators and their failures, confess complicities, *publicly* acknowledge harm done, express lament and confession, ask for forgiveness and indicate intentions to change behaviours.

- Nurturing justice means resisting loyalty cultures.

Loyalty is profiled as a virtue except when it is used to avoid justice and truth-telling. Jesus' concept of justice is seen as very different to worldly paradigms in that it involves doing what is right and good *and* includes love, empathy and compassion. A justice culture recognises injustice, presses on to goodness regardless of what fallout might eventuate, and tells the complete narrative about what occurs.

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[447] Ibid., 118.

[448] Ibid., 137.

- Nurturing service includes resisting celebrity cultures.

    Service oriented cultures are other person centred rather than celebrity focused. Servant pastors put people first, emphasise grace, demonstrate empathy, tell the truth and shape ministry in appropriate directions. Celebrating service as heroic or sacrificial rather than part of the ordinary life of the community generates a celebrity culture that easily draws attention to significant people and community leaders. Accountability can then be minimised or avoided, envy can prosper and self-glory can be promoted.

    Creating a service culture starts with leaders serving and not with leaders speaking. It means benevolence and paternalism are avoided and other voices are heard, including from pulpits and lecterns. Arguments are not always won while transparency is insisted on.

- Nurturing Christoformity resists leader cultures.

    McKnight believes United States churches have become increasingly shaped by meritocratic principles about achieving and accomplishing. In this environment, leaders are defined in terms of entrepreneurial and visionary skills and their churches are described as organisations rather than cared for as organisms. Churches are expected to produce products and the Bible is scanned for leadership principles, while pastors are trained more in business skills than in theology or ministry.

    Pastors are 'called to nurture Christoformity' in themselves and in other people. This calling is not only about preaching but includes caring for and nurturing people and not using power or privilege to abuse them.[449]

    Churches are to become communities where personal gifts are shared in interdependent ways that

    > honour, worship, and serve God, under the exclusive headship of Jesus Christ, and empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit.[450]

Scot McKnight: *Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christoformity in the Church*[451]

I add a further focus on the apostle Paul, aware that considering literature on the Gospels and Jesus might be at least as valuable. My interest in reading about Paul and in wanting to discern Pauline theology was assisted and encouraged by F. F.

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[449] Ibid., 211, cf. 217, 218.

[450] Ibid. 215.

[451] Scot McKnight, *Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christoformity in the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Brazos Press, 2019).

Bruce's *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit*.[452] More recently, I have appreciated insights from N. T. Wright's *Paul: A Biography*.[453]

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McKnight does not claim to be a pastor, even though I, and I suspect many other people, have found his writing and speaking significantly pastoral. Pastoring involves spiritual formation, is complicated and unpredictable, and includes more than preaching sermons. Pastoring is a generalist rather than a specialist calling that can wear pastors down from seemingly incessant and unrealisable demands.

Pastors are 'called to nurture a culture of Christoformity' as culture makers, a construct he developed from Michael Gorman's use of cruciformity.[454] This calling, for McKnight, is a participation 'in the ongoing work of Christ through the Spirit in the world'. It is about God's plans and purposes rather than those of any pastor or preacher.[455]

Nurturing this culture involves pastors, people, relationships and systems. It

- prioritises people ahead of programs and plans.

- focuses on pastoring as more than performing roles.

- involves learning to listen to God, Scripture and people authentically without calculating ways to achieve outcomes.

- embodies prophetic discernment in prophetic actions.

- includes becoming a Spirit-led, God-presence in the community.

- accepts 'the undeniable mediatorial responsibility of pastoring' in terms of redemption, holiness, sacred space, knowledge, prayer, presence and worship.[456]

- acts as a servant alongside priestly and prophetic pastoring.

- provides wisdom-seeking giftedness-endorsing leadership.

- resists temptations to be a celebrity or to seek power over other people.

McKnight, after setting this context, then devotes his book to reflecting on Paul's pastoral concerns in terms of friendship, siblingship, generosity, storytelling, witnessing, subverting the world and wisdom.

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[452] Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit*.

[453] N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (United States: HarperCollins Religious, 2020).

[454] McKnight, *Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christoformity in the Church*, 3.

[455] Ibid., 5.

[456] Ibid., 21.

- Authentic *friendships* move beyond utility and pleasure. They involve trust, loyalty and honesty. They are reliable, present with the other person in difficult times and advocate for them when they are accused or maligned. Emotions are evident *in this context* and so facilitate reconciliation when possible.

- The *sibling* metaphor is very common in Paul's letters. It relates to ideas about family and household where emotional, economic and educational support can be expected. Preachers who think about audiences, counsellors who consider souls, teachers who are concerned about students and sacramentalists who see sinners, frame and attempt to nurture their communities in different ways.

  Sibling relationships are evident in mutual love and growth, in safe and secure boundaries and in an awareness that their source and sustenance are 'through the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit'.[457]

- Discussions about Paul's continuity with the Gospel's portrayal of Jesus' concerns for economic justice and welfare invariably turn towards Paul's sense of *generosity* when gathering funds for the Jerusalem church. Paul describes it as being a collection, a grace-gift, a blessing, a liturgical and service ministry and an expression of fellowship.

  McKnight describes 'economic Christoformity' as caring for the poor and using money and resources wisely and equitably to facilitate unity and worship while ensuring accountability.[458] Acting this way generates social bonds by encouraging mutual reciprocity as worshipful expressions of thankfulness to God. Relationships with other churches and communities are also more likely in this environment.

- Israel's beliefs were primarily shared as a *story* rather than as a system or a creed. This story grew by successive iterations, upon which Paul constructed his gospel. Themes in Paul's story-telling profile Jesus as Lord over Israel's story, as Lord over the cosmos and as Lord over evil, death, sin, rulers and powers, and the church.

  McKnight concludes that 'the Christoform story is the story of death and resurrection, not just the story of conquest and triumph. … To let any other story gain ascendance or centrality … is idolatry'.[459]

- New Testament *witnesses* described what they observed by being present. Their identifying and embodying led other people to align themselves with

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[457] Ibid., 78.

[458] Ibid., 86, 87.

[459] Ibid., 126.

them. This profile of being witnesses provides perspectives on whether Paul's Damascus Road experience is best understood as a conversion or a commissioning.

If conversions are framed by the group joined, by the person belonging and by the interactions of the group and its new member, then this new adherent's testimony is significant in validating their membership. McKnight summarises conversion as gaining a 'new autobiography'.[460]

Paul associated with and began new groups and wrote a personal story centred on Jesus in Israel's context, on Paul's entry into and sharing in the Jesus-story and on the benefits that exist for those who participate in the new communities formed by this story. Paul saw himself embodying this narrative including in his sufferings. His *not I but Christ* terminology means that

> Paul's story is the story of Christ, not his own story. So lost is Paul in the story of Christ that his story is only meaningful if it is the story of Christ.[461]

- *Subversion* involves explicitly communicated, transformative values that oppose existing systems and processes. It is a socio-political process that resists established structures to replace them. Paul's ministry could be seen as subversive as he proclaimed the reign of God in contradistinction to Caesar's regime and Jewish beliefs.

  The status driven, honour-shame Roman culture was fundamentally different to Paul's '*bio*-form, *cruci*-form, and *anastasi*-form' theology of Jesus' humanity, crucifixion and resurrection. The culture Paul worked towards was based on 1 Corinthians 1:18ff and Philippians 2:1ff where Christoformity, cruciformity and *theosis* are all seamlessly integrated.[462]

  The impact of this subversion was evident in Paul's views of rhetorical eloquence, his engagement in manual labour, his rejection of status driven labels and his refusal to see people from the perspectives identified by the honour-shame culture in which he lived.

- *Wisdom* writings may be defined in terms of goodness. McKnight describes wisdom as 'living in God's world in God's ways'.[463] A wise person seeks to conserve and be guided by what is good, to revere God, to be receptive to teaching, to be characterised by authentic living, to act prudently and with

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[460] Ibid., 137.

[461] Ibid., 145.

[462] Ibid., 156, 159. Cf. Michael Gorman's books on cruciformity and related themes.

[463] Ibid., 172.

discretion, and to be timely in this lifestyle. Wisdom literature is not restricted to selected Old Testament books and biblical wisdom does not secularise its theological or spiritual teaching.

Paul's wisdom statements contrast the apparent foolishness of Jesus' death with Christ as God's incarnate and reconciling power, wisdom and life-source. Paul built on Jewish beliefs about wisdom originating in God, being infused in creation, identified with God's spirit, immanent in the world, and received as a gift, while 'simultaneously acquired by disciplined effort'.[464] So convinced was Paul about Christ as God's wisdom that he re-wrote the Jewish Shema around Jesus (1 Corinthians 8:5, 6). Paul's comments on worldliness as folly were not disparaging of creation; they reset creation as God's habitat and as the location and destiny of God's renewed, restored and reconciled humanity.

McKnight summarises his thoughts on establishing wisdom as being a process of 'personal embodiment' nurtured by leaders who help people mature and so be more able to behave and speak wisely.[465] Leaders are called to understand the past, think towards the future and to discern appropriate present action in this context. They are to remember that Jesus was and is God's personified wisdom and that the Holy Spirit advocates for him.

Ken Blue: *Healing Spiritual Abuse: How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences*[466]

Blue emphasises one of his main themes by adding *The Biblical answer to the wounds of legalism* to its title, *Healing Spiritual Abuse: How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences*. He begins by inviting readers to freedom regarding spiritually abusive relationships. He defines spiritual abuse as the misuse of power and authority and thinks that those committing it may be 'curiously naïve' about its impact even though it can cause catastrophic results.[467] He believes spiritual abuse is not always intended to harm anyone, making it potentially even more toxic.

Blue refers to the way ministers engage in spiritual abuse when they work towards doing as they please by manipulating people using trust. Those experiencing its greatest impact are often among the most committed and are probably already suffering under an oppressive hierarchical regime. Blue is convinced spiritual abuse

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[464] Ibid., 178.

[465] Ibid., 185.

[466] Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse: How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993).

[467] Ibid., Location 42 of 1589.

is likely to occur in these groups and claims they usually remain silent 'about spiritual abuse, the one social problem Jesus himself seemed to care about most'.[468]

Spiritual abuse arises, according to Blue, when ministers act as gatekeepers, emphasise performance and restrict a church's life by using 'unanimity and uniformity' to insist on their power and profile.[469] He claims however that

> truth always outranks position or title in the church. Truth and its authority are not rooted in a personality or office [but are] derived from the Word of God and the gospel it proclaims.[470]

He argues that legalism is used to manipulate people by generating guilt, obligations and submission. Legalistic demands arise from thinking that law-keeping is God's requirement for acceptance, by believing that holiness is a personal project and by feeling obligated to make leaders look and feel good. Good shepherds, by contrast, remove loads, do not contradict grace and mercy by their actions, and are not dishonest or deceitful.

Blue claims that 'no talk' rules are among the worst spiritually abusive behaviours. Deception and suppression enable spiritual abuses to occur and to sap fellowship. He references Schaef and Fasell's 'addictive organisation' terminology when mentioning indirect inferences and gossip.[471] Those who confront these behaviours are usually blamed for causing trouble and can expect to encounter unsubstantiated criticism and uplining:

> Uplining means that members of the group must bring all questions and concerns to the leader directly over them. They are never to discuss any problem with anyone other than this person. This leader is then to keep this concern to himself or pass it up to the leader above him. Such a closed system enables the leaders to control the flow of information and to silence any person or issue they choose to.
>
> … Arterburn and Felton explain, 'Communication in a toxic faith system isn't a two-way interaction. Information is valid only if it comes from the top of the organization and is passed down to the bottom'.[472]

Blue believes that ministers who commit spiritual abuse aim to 'confuse, manipulate and intimidate' and avoid accountability rather than clarifying their

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[468] Ibid., 105.

[469] Ibid., 238.

[470] Ibid., 225.

[471] Ibid., 644–650.

[472] Ibid., 659. Cf. David Farrier, 'What's Going on with Megachurches?,' https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/episode-208-david-farrier-whats-going-on-with-megachurches/.

actions and acknowledging their mistakes.[473] He says these ministers major on minor concerns and avoid more significant ones.

He also believes that although some of those impacted by spiritual abuse leave too soon, most stay too long. He insists Matthew 18 indicates that those who have been spiritually abused are to confront offending ministers even though these ministers are likely to have 'a curious innocence' about the damage they are causing and refuse to admit any failure:

> Even the most hardened abusers somehow sense that people will not put up with them forever, so (out of guilt or guile) they learn the art of episodic kindness.[474]

The negative impact of spiritual abuse by betrayal and dishonesty adds to any spiritual abuse already suffered when respected ministers act as adversaries. This makes forgiveness even more difficult, especially when those who have been spiritually abused realise the extent to which they were groomed into submission and compliance.

Blue nominates spiritual abusers as either insecure and, in wanting power, 'often put their heel on the necks of those under their authority', or 'heroic, grandiose or messianic' narcissists or both.[475] Narcissists, according to Blue, prioritise praise over maturation, inflate their own sense of significance and are likely to see other people's reputations and needs as inconsequential. The extent to which a leader's self-perceived entitlement accompanies congregational tolerance, accommodation and dismissal of obvious weaknesses and failures is described as potentially dangerous.[476]

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[473] Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse: How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences*, 744.

[474] Ibid., 906, 917.

[475] Ibid., 997, 1034.

[476] Cf. John Elzinga, *Thank God I'm Not a Pharisee … or Am I?* (Maitland, Florida: Xulon Press, Incorporated, 2005), 120–135:

[There are] four ways in which spiritual leaders of today can become Pharisees. They are:

- The 'Don't touch me' aura
- The 'I'm responsible for you' mind-set
- 'Scriptural Intimidation' and control
- 'Locked in' social undercurrents

All of these are self-reinforcing principles and overlap each other. … These four ways combined create a … modern day Pharisee … unwittingly, unknowingly, and unintentionally out of any Christian leader. …

[The] temptation to become Pharisaical is stronger and easier within the pastorate and leadership of local churches precisely because of all the props available to them. …

Any over-aggrandizement of 'responsibility' leads to a controlling and authoritarian condition. … [An] overly high and mighty sense of responsibility becomes Pharisaical [when] we get the priesthood of the pastorate rather than the priesthood of all believers. …

After a conservative evangelical profile of shame, law, conscience and grace, Blue warns his readers that

> most abusive religious systems are very well rationalized and well defended. … Spiritual abuse is never the result of confused thinking. It is caused by a lust for power.[477]

He suggests that leaving is likely to remain as the best and most loving option even though it is rarely easy. He concludes by exploring healthy church leadership, equality in the Spirit, healthy discipline without hierarchy and servant power.

Tim Hein: *Understanding Sexual Abuse – a Guide for Ministry Leaders and Survivors*[478]

Hein commences by warning of the dangers in comparing people's experiences and by insisting all abuse is traumatic and underestimating it is likely to increase one's trauma. He believes child abuse is contrary to the gospel and regrets what he sees as the institutional complicity of Christian groups through their lack of proactivity, especially given the prevalence of child abuse and the silencing and secrecy it involves. He points out that safe communities articulate the obvious and have leaders who recognise and act appropriately regarding their inherent position power. This best occurs when leaders are honest and open about their failures and commend those who identify leaders' shortcomings.

Survivors of child abuse usually feel shocked when realising they are experiencing trauma and that continual suppression of past events is unsuccessful. They then wonder who to inform, whether they will be believed and why their perpetrator would abuse them when he or she is otherwise respected and loved. This undermining of the survivor's sense of identity also provides a new awareness of their struggles and so a window of potential hope.

Hein defines trauma as 'the past hijacking the present' and grooming as using friendship to develop a trusted relationship specifically to act inappropriately.[479] He sees this as a 'massive betrayal' of trust.[480] Victims are unlikely to seek help as the process is gradual and leaves them feeling powerless and fearful.

Part of a system that enables Pharisaical leadership to prosper is found in the reality that people are pretty much locked into their present environment and church body. To say it more clearly, if you want to fellowship in the church you are a part of, you better support what's going on. If you don't, you will be ostracized, alienated, or asked to leave.

[477] Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse: How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences*, 1286.

[478] Tim Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse: A Guide for Ministry Leaders and Survivors* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Muddy Pearl, 2018).

[479] Ibid., 16, cf. 130.

[480] Ibid., 22.

Victims usually try to cope by blaming themselves for what occurred. They live with an outer identity trying to be good and to do well while their inner being 'is a hidden chasm of badness and is marked by fear, anger, and shame'.[481] This existence is demanding and can lead to emotional volatility and dissociation.

Hein quotes Judith Herman's views that victims experience dysphoria and that 'traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary symptoms of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning' which leads to '*hyperarousal, intrusion,* and *constriction*'.[482] Ongoing anticipation of danger and fear of certain people and contexts are aspects of post-traumatic stress that require wise assistance. Survivors, along with their families and friends, usually also *underestimate* a predator's seductive manipulation and the resultant secrecy and coercion.

Survivors should be acknowledged by being diligently heard and by being believed for their openness and honesty. Survivors, according to Hein, reveal their secrets 'only when they feel genuinely safe or are desperate'. Their listeners are advised to acknowledge that they are glad to be told, that no one deserves what happened, that they are not their adviser, and that the survivor's recovery occurs by being empowered as its 'author and arbiter'.[483]

Survivors need to be aware of and cope with the reality that their perpetrator will use blackmail, intimidation and accusations in the perpetrator's determination to maintain secrecy and ensure their victims remain passive and quiet. Survivors also need to manage their own self-talk and avoid blaming themselves, criticising themselves for any positive feelings they experienced while being abused, fearing any negative impacts their abuser might experience if they make public what happened, and for causing difficulties.

Both self-talk and secrecy create shame for feeling inadequate, being a failure and fearing humiliation. Edward Welch is mentioned for linking shame with feeling like an outcast, feeling exposed and vulnerable, and feeling filthy.

Hein sees destructive cycles being broken when survivors inform someone whom they trust about what has happened:

> You are not alone. Everything in the moral grain of the universe affirms your right to tell the truth about your experience. You are free to speak the unspeakable. You are in control.[484]

Healing and recovery, according to Hein, best involves spiritual *and* physical aspects. The survivor's journey is not to be publicly profiled. Recovery means

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[481] Ibid., 24.

[482] Ibid., 32.

[483] Ibid., 42.

[484] Ibid., 51.

identifying oneself as a survivor rather than a victim. It means being on a 'journey *of* recovery' rather than 'a journey *to* recovery'.[485]

Hein quotes M. Scott Peck defining love as nurturing acts of self-extension. Love is a courageous activity that creates wholeness and flourishing even when faced with fear. Hein also refers to Judith Herman's framework for 'genuine trauma recovery'. He believes it facilitates a steady movement 'to reliable safety, … acknowledged memory, and … restored social connection':[486]

- Inner and external *safety* create peace and security by building trusted relationships, recognising symptoms and reducing stress and anxiety.

- Finding appropriate language to describe what occurred and its impact is likely to be difficult and to need interpretation. While it can be expected to take time, to require courage and to involve *remembrance and mourning*, it also enables a survivor to regain some control.

- Mourning and linked memories gradually become part of a more healthy and larger narrative as survivors review and revise their stories and as *reconnection*, integration and redevelopment flourish in new situations.[487]

Hein addresses the way survivors are often pressured to forgive their perpetrators, especially by well-meaning Christians, and suggests this may often be more about those promoting forgiveness avoiding the reality of the survivor's experience. This approach can be expected to add to the impact of what has already occurred by creating myths that forgiveness ends trauma. *Forgetting*, *moving on* and *letting go* are named as potentially deceitful and dishonest delusions that deny the

> profound oppression of their personal rights, violation of their bodies through deception and possible force, betrayal of trust, exploitation of power, and the tyrannical imposition of secrecy and personal shame.[488]

Hein quotes Karen Lebacqz's belief that forgiveness is not sentimentality and needs to be based on justice and truth. Hein believes that 'true forgiveness necessitates that we first condemn the act as wrong. We must name it'.[489] He places this response in the context of human and divine anger, pointing out that God's anger is against anything that is not good in God's creation, and that God's anger is an aspect of God's love.

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[485] Ibid., 58.

[486] Ibid., 61.

[487] Ibid., 61ff. Hein explores these themes in the context of Ellen Bass and Lauren Davis' thirteen stages on a path to recovery.

[488] Ibid., 74.

[489] Ibid., 75.

The opposite of love, for Hein, is indifference, not anger. Anger precludes revenge and sets the course for a forgiveness based on relinquishment, pardon and possible reconciliation. This process can help minimise the survivor's focus on their predator and improve their sense of self and purpose.

Those caring for survivors need to discern the relationship between orthodoxy and orthopathy when helping survivors gain fresh understandings of suffering and pain. This approach recognises sadness and rejects notions of forced joyfulness. It allows worship in 'minor keys' as well as major ones and acknowledges that trauma inevitably involves loss.[490]

Rather than focusing on stoicism and control, Hein believes the 'sheer humility and vulnerability of an eternal God dying on a cross for the sin of the world is incredible'. He sees God suffering for him as fear-dissolving since Jesus is his 'trauma survivor'. He finds that 'the brutality of Christ's death' makes 'the sacrament of Communion deeply comforting.[491]

Hein concludes his book encouraging a look at *this* Jesus while emphasising that long-term recovery involves recognising 'that even if we are travelling well, and perhaps have ceased counselling for a season after some good work, a new stage of life will often bring the need for support again'.[492] He encourages survivors with practical suggestions that help them *choose life* including by learning enjoyment and cultivating friendship, by finding physical and mental sanctuaries and by establishing a good balance of sleep and exercise. He sees *duende* in two of Leonard Cohen's songs and identifies survivors as having increased *and* decreased resilience and that weeping is mysterious, precious, vulnerable and cathartic.[493]

Christine M. Mitchell and David R. Williams: *Black Lives Matter: A Theological Response to Racism's impact on the Black Body in the United States*[494]

Mitchell and Williams' black theological perspectives of the body profile several of the ways racism has involved – and continues to involve – physical violence. They provide suggestions informed by black theology for churches wanting to make anti-racist responses. They emphasise that the impact on those suffering violence is greater than their tragic deaths, that many black people die from racist

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[490] Ibid., 110ff, citing philosopher James K. A. Smith and pastor John Swinton. Hein mentions lament as one of Swinton's five practices of redemption from John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007). The others are forgiveness, thoughtfulness, hospitality and friendship.

[491] Hein, *Understanding Sexual Abuse: A Guide for Ministry Leaders and Survivors*, 116ff. esp. 119.

[492] Ibid., 128.

[493] Ibid., 138ff. Leonard songs cited are *Hallelujah* and *Anthem*: Cohen, 'Leonard Cohen Files, The'..

[494] Christine M. Mitchell and David R. Williams, 'Black Lives Matter: A Theological Response to Racism's Impact on the Black Body in the United States,' *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 43, no. 1 (2017): 28–45.

violence and that this violence '*constantly* [lands] on black and brown bodies' regardless of media attention.[495]

Mitchell and Williams' overview of the body in black theology commences with reference to James Cone's Christology that locates Jesus in the historic and ongoing struggle and pain of black people. Jesus' death is linked with the lynching trees and the cross is seen as 'a symbol of empowerment, rather than a symbol of redemptive suffering'.[496]

The authors profile Delores Williams' 'analysis of surrogacy' that there is little, if any, redemption or atonement value in Jesus' suffering. Coerced surrogacy means women suffered violence. Her focus is on 'Jesus' *ministerial* vision of life' rather than on his death. She insists that 'Jesus did not come to be a surrogate' and that surrogacy images and related ideas serve to strengthen unhelpful agendas about exploitation and violence against black people.[497]

Anthony Pinn's humanist perspective is described as centring on black physical bodies rather than religious metaphors and symbols. Bodies are considered as physical *and* social if racist power differentials are to be understood accurately. Theodicy is useless 'theological throat clearing' that avoids individual experiences and systemic behaviours. Pinn's and similar perspectives see little benefit in black churches and divine law. Ta-Nehisi Coates's atheistic view is that

> The enslaved were not bricks in your road, and their lives were not chapters in your redemptive history. They were people turned to fuel for the American machine.[498]

Mitchell and Williams state that making victims of racist violence into 'Christlike martyrs' disembodies and removes them from the power-based environments in which they lived and so prevents an informed understanding their stories. These power-based racist contexts systemically devalue, disempower and differentially allocate opportunities and resources by 'structural, institutional, interpersonal, and internalised' means:

> One reason it is so important to embrace a black theology that acknowledges the physicality of the black body, the social structures that shape the body, and the entirety of lived experience, is because racism has a lifelong physical and mental impact on the black body.[499]

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[495] Ibid., 30.

[496] Ibid., 31.

[497] Ibid., 31–32.

[498] Ibid., 33.

[499] Ibid., 34, 35.

The authors believe churches need to be more interracial and to better consider the extent of their inertia regarding the status quo, especially (citing Cone) as they focus on forgiveness and ignore Jesus' political involvement. Churches need to recognise and respond to the way society has considered black bodies and the awful impact of violence on actual people. These responses best include putting their own bodies 'on the line' with black people.[500]

Valerie H. Hobbs: *No love in war: A story of Christian nationalism*[501]

Prologue

Hobbs, in writing about the impact of Christian Reconstructionism on her and on United States politics and religion, states that

> traumatising events can, like corpses, sink rapidly to the deepest seabed of one's memory, until, having decomposed, they rise with sudden buoyancy, triggered sometimes by even the most innocuous or seemingly unrelated event, word, smell, sound, touch.[502]

She speaks of being unexpectedly reminded of artefacts which she had kept or discarded. These past 'putrefied' relics surface memories of predatory, male warriors and their dominating and imposing worldviews. Her mementos assist her in negating and reconstructing their significance, and in not being controlled, 'stunted and silent'.[503]

Histories of communities identify who was enabled and empowered and whose voices were silenced and erased. In reflecting on her own experiences, Hobbs says she knows 'what hides in the cracks' and that these openings are 'like wounds that are never sewn up, they are crying out to be seen, to be wept over, to be soothed and healed'. Recovery, she asserts, is facilitated through telling, listening and learning about the past.[504]

Hobbs sees benefits in sharing her story while these warriors are alive, and that this story-telling is a compassionate and life-giving offering, a 'restorative medicine to the dying'. She says that she seeks to remember what she has witnessed as a reminder of the ongoing benefits that have come to herself, her descendants, her friends and 'anyone who asks'.

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[500] Ibid., 42.

[501] Valerie H. Hobbs, *No Love in War: A Story of Christian Nationalism* (London, United Kingdom: Mayfly Books, 2023).

[502] Ibid., 1.

[503] Ibid., 3.

[504] Ibid., 4.

> My history is a part of [our citizenship and Earth's] history, I too belong
> here, I have eyes and ears and a mouth, I was there in those places. What
> happens to me matters. I matter.[505]

She views evangelical and Pentecostal belief systems as being infused by Christian
Dominionism and aligns her book with themes of 'Land, Grave, Fire and Womb'
from Proverbs 30:15–16 'which illustrate that insatiable attitude, that greedy,
demanding desire for more and more that dominates and destroys the earth and
all it contains'. Hobbs hopes her insights will provide guidance to those who are
disturbed by the 'gluttony for power' that she sees in Christian Dominionism.[506]

Epilogue

Her Epilogue addresses aspects of leaving her former church culture, of saying 'no
to being treated like an appendage in service of the vision of a gaggle of talking
masculine heads'. Hobbs sees rejecting those who were 'harming me, claiming me,
seeking dominion over me' as a 'yes to myself', to truth, and to anyone with similar
stories. She identifies this as an affirmation of true love which rejects fear.[507]

After outlining a series of incidents relevant to her decisions to leave, she writes
that 'I Left. Subject + verb + zero object'.[508] Hobbs says her damaged reputation
among those who once seemed so powerful illustrates the way these male leaders
sought to control the narrative about her departure and the traumatic experiences
that were connected with its timing. She believes they were not prepared 'to be
even a little bit wrong' and indicates she was hunted and groomed by 'those who
catch the scent of our wounds, stalk us in pursuit of the taste of fresh meat, [and]
pull us down into the dust of their earthly ambition'.[509]

Hobbs concluded by emphasising that this empire building Dominionist theology
plunders 'the stunning mystery of intimacy and connection, of gentleness and
dignity, of complexity, of knowing and being known, of letting go, of revelling in
beauty without calculating its kingdom purpose'. Contentment for her includes
the treasures of experiencing 'sensitivity and self-loving and self-sacrificial service'
by being in quiet spaces away from toxic expressions of power and domination.[510]

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[505] Ibid., 4, 5.

[506] Ibid., 7.

[507] Ibid., 249, 250.

[508] Ibid., 254.

[509] Ibid., 264.

[510] Ibid., 265.

Chuck DeGroat: *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Further Reflections*[511]

DeGroat contrasts the Jesus described in the Philippians 2 *kenotic* profile with 'evangelicalism's conflation of church and empire' where cruciformity is readily replaced with 'hierarchy, patriarchy and power':

> Jesus self-empties while we grasp. Jesus chooses servanthood while we sidle up to the powerful. … We didn't recognize Jesus because we assumed he'd come in our own image – Zealots and Pharisees and Sadducees that we are.

Shame vs. self-love

Narcissus, according to DeGroat, lacked self-love and was therefore not willing to let other people be close to him and become vulnerable when relating to them.

> He dies searching for [his] illusive false self. He dies in his addiction. … In other words, he's trapped in a vicious narcissistic feedback loop.

His shame-based existence meant that he refused to seek help or to alter his behaviour and that he insisted on protecting his unreal persona.

The longing to be freed from longing

A self-obsessed and self-destructive pursuit of an imaginary self ultimately leads to dehumanising forms of control and damages oneself, one's relationships and other people. Narcissists know the truth about their own selves and the falsity of the imaginary personas in which they want everyone to believe. Access to open and vulnerable relationships is closed off unless they address their 'shame and loneliness, [and their] terror and heartache'.

Rage and shame in a narcissistic leader

Narcissistic leaders range from those with a narcissistic style to those fitting a narcissistic type to those whose narcissism affects their whole identity. It is best to avoid trying to help a narcissist person by confronting them as they are likely to be defensive and to become more resistant to change and to want to avoid any scrutiny of their inner true self. 'Human limitation, fragility, and weakness hurts [the narcissist] too much' and so openness and vulnerability are avoided.

Why we follow narcissists

People follow narcissistic leaders when searching for an idealised norm and this quest readily leads to communities accommodating narcissistic forms of leadership and not noticing the warning signs that something significant is wrong. The damage occurring is then minimalised and marginalised because the narcissist's

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[511] Chuck DeGroat, "When Narcissism Comes to Church: Further Reflections," in *Calvin University Noon Lecture Series* (2020). For more detail than included in this brief summary of DeGroat's lecture see *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2020).

public persona can create a sense of empowerment and affirmation. Narcissistic leaders might initially energise those who may feel powerless before people realise the inevitable damage that the narcissist is doing in and to the community and to those who are deeply involved in it.

Collective narcissism

Collective narcissism follows this patterns and happens in various people groups. It creates a sense of being 'a part of something special, powerful, blessed, anointed, chosen'. The boundaries between narcissistic attitudes and legitimate aspirations can be easily crossed under self-absorbed and self-promoting leadership.

Final Observations

Collective and individual narcissism are not new phenomena. They recur with new patterns as social and psychological changes occur. Just as Constantine merged church and empire, so religious and political leaders invert the biblical cruciformic narrative into one that imagines itself

> as powerful, strong, rich, influential, and unstoppable … [and which] animates colonialism, white supremacy, and nationalistic exceptionalism.

History includes those in the debris of these kind of destructive exploitations who lived effectively aligned with the Jesus of the Gospels and the other New Testament documents. Their contentment with the ordinariness of everyday faithful living contrasts with leaders focused on personal ambition and self-glorification.

Additional note

Two notes by DeGroat on social media tell the story of what he has observed in his professional work:

> In 50 years of life and 25 years of ministry, I don't think anything disheartens me more than Christians complicit in abuses of power and a contempt for truth in both ecclesial and political spaces where so much good is possible. A massive reckoning awaits us. Lord have mercy.

> I've worked with hundreds of folks over 25 years from all different stripes, backgrounds and faith traditions, and you know who has the hardest time with [accepting their difficulties]? Christian leaders.[512]

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[512] "Christian Leaders … Hardest Time," (2020, 2023).

Conclusion

Post-preparation

School teaching might seem like a repetitive vocation. I have heard it claimed that some teachers teach for, say, ten years, while others teach one year ten times. Every end of a series of lessons begins a new one and every commencement of a fresh topic marks the conclusion of a previous one. Depending on the setting, some lesson sequences may run in parallel.

While a school year comprises a cluster of sequences before the cycle is repeated, each group of students – and every student – is unique and creates a learning opportunity for both teacher and student that will never happen again. I found this process inviting me to celebrate and recreate various curriculum topics ready for whenever (or if ever) I was privileged to teach them again.

I called this celebration and re-creation process *post-preparation* and adapted it to lay preaching and teaching contexts. *Redefining* is a *review with a view* activity in that same kind of spirit. It follows eight earlier books that share edited versions of many of my lay ministry resources – outlines which were written and then updated in something of this *post-preparation* mindset. It also comes after publishing a book containing an edited version of my Master of Theological Studies dissertation.[513]

Two significant separate events each led to a hiatus before a third transition marked a terminus to my public lay ministry. There is, therefore, more than a hint of what Richard Rohr calls a second life in my writing and sharing *Redefining*.[514] I have appreciated many insights in reflecting on the transience of life, including this one:

> I hear the ancient footsteps like the motion of the sea
> Sometimes I turn, there's someone there, other times it's only me
> I am hanging in the balance of the reality of man
> Like every sparrow falling, like every grain of sand.[515]

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[513] Don Priest, *Meditations on Hope and Peace* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022) and *Meditations on Resilience and Renewal*, vol. 1, (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022); ibid., 2. are edited collections of sermon notes. Priest, *Living Love*, *Travelling Together* and *Towards Eternity* (Printed by Openbook Howden, St Marys, South Australia, 2022) are edited collections of study series and related reflections. *Meditations on Hope and Peace* and *Living Love* are nearly all from when we lived in country communities, with the others from after we returned to the city.

Living in Love and Freedom is edited collections of sermon and series notes and additional reflections from a briefer third era of lay preaching and teaching. *Learning to Love Wisdom* is an augmented and edited version of my theological studies dissertation. *In Triune Community* is an edited collection of seasonal school sessions during the first two phases of lay ministry profiled in this series of Conversations.

[514] Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

[515] Bob Dylan, 'Every Grain of Sand,' https://www.bobdylan.com/songs/every-grain-sand/.

Hospitality or hostage-taking

Laypeople face many challenges during and after what they regard as unwelcome and inappropriate actions by ordained ministers. I have seen people follow a range of pathways concerning these crises while wanting their participation in any group to include a sense of belonging, to respect their credibility, to exclude being bullied or belittled, and to avoid being silenced about alleged offensive behaviour.

Some people refuse outright to associate with Christian groups not just because of what is publicly profiled but as the result of what is more directly communicated to them about abuses of privilege and power. Other people abandon Christian communities and undergo some form of faith deconstruction and reconstruction because of what they consider abusive and offensive. A further group move from one situation to another hoping to find fresh acceptance and consolation and are often in an outward spiral with increasingly lower levels of engagement. A last group stay in the original location, usually out of loyalty or because of peer friendship, and try to relate to leaders in other ways while hoping they move on.

My experience suggests that ministers who are questioned escalate rather than moderate, and that they use binary, dualistic, zero-sum processes to exclude any conversations or conciliations that might lead them to admit to factual errors.

Their inversion techniques create false and/or exaggerated focus on the person expressing concern while claiming that their systemic actions were organisational, private, personal and/or friendship related. Ministers who follow this pattern are likely to avoid scrutiny and accountability.

This pattern of fame-blame, claim-shame, prosperity-retribution, grace-wrath behaviour operates on *up-is-good* and *down-is-bad* power-based controlling hierarchy contexts where laypeople are rarely, if ever, given any opportunity to participate in properly structured, independent procedurally fair processes where adequate provision is made for their welfare. Processes may be framed in terms of hospitality but are usually more about capturing hostages. Friendship and relationships might be the narrative, but enmity and cold-hearted transactions are more often the reality.

There is much to be learnt about coping with abuse from the responses of our own indigenous communities to the ways they have been treated, as well as from those racially discriminated against in other countries. There is a great deal to be gained by recognising the shameful social and religious demeaning of women in our communities and elsewhere.

Spiritual abuse is not ephemeral and other worldly. It is not resolved by docetic or Platonist philosophies. It is about lived experiences. It is about human bodies and people's hearts, minds and souls and so it is about spiritual *and* physical lives. If these realities are invalid then not only is the death of Jesus a sham, so is his incarnation and resurrection.

Distortions of Paul's injunction in Romans 12:1ff can be used to coerce people into more and more self-sacrificing actions which end up simply serving the ambitions of Christian leaders to the detriment of those giving of themselves in various supportive ways. Perhaps J. B. Phillips' paraphrase of Romans 12:1ff can be further paraphrased:

> Don't let the [church institutions] around you squeeze you into [their] own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.[516]

Presence, participation and partnership, safety and serenity

… in exile – in Christendom as Babylon:[517]

I hope *Redefining* provides some helpful resources from a range of perspectives that encourage reinvigorating and reaffirming conversations, especially for anyone on difficult journeys with Christian churches and related communities.

One process that may be of assistance is listening to and reflecting on affirming and encouraging voices using a TASTE and SEE process (cf. Psalm 34) where it is not only possible and permissible, but safe and welcome to

> Talk
> About
> Spiritually
> Toxic and trauma inducing
> Experiences and encounters

and where it is acceptable and appropriate for

> Survivors to
> Explore
> Evidence

> ******

> Ah the wars they will be fought again
> The holy dove she will be caught again
> bought and sold and bought again
> the dove is never free.[518]

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[516] J. B. (translator) Phillips, *New Testament in Modern English, The*, trans. J. B. Phillips (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1960).

[517] Cf. Jeremiah 29:5; also Pádraig Ó Tuama, *Maranatha* (https://peterrollins.com/afl/43/2020, https://padraigotuama.bandcamp.com/album/hymns-to-swear-by).

[518] Cohen, 'Leonard Cohen Files, The'. *Anthem*.

Redefining

It doesn't matter now
It's over anyhow
He tells the world that it's sleeping
But as the night came round
I heard its lonely sound
It wasn't roaring, it was weeping.[519]

Who will raise their voice, as the cruel winds blow?
And who will call a truce, and who can break our fall?
Whisper words of reason to those without a song –
Who will raise their voice, and carry us along?[520]

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I will arise and follow you over,
Saviour please, pilot me.

Over the waves and through every sorrow,
Saviour please, pilot me.

When I have no more strength left to follow,
Fall on my knees, pilot me.

May your sun rise and lead me on,
Over the seas, Saviour pilot me.[521]

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[519] Heymann, 'Weeping'. This song relates to the era of South African apartheid.

[520] Capercaillie, 'Capercaillie,' https://www.capercaillie.co.uk/releases/lyrics/. This song most likely refers to the Scottish clearances. Cf. Keith Reid et al., 'You're The Voice,' https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/johnfarnham/yourethevoice.html.

[521] Josh Garrels, *Pilot Me* (https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/joshgarrels/pilotme.html, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcLuUt-dyks, 2011).

Conversations along the way

Conversations along the way records ideas and perspectives exploring biblical themes written over many years as rough drafts or more revised documents. I hope my thoughts may be enriching and encouraging. Where my writing suggests ideas and frameworks that vary from those held by other Christians, our common faith can keep us in community and help us explore and possibly reconcile our differences. I hope readers with non-theistic and/or secular understandings can find some helpful common values, even though I have used what might seem to be merely a discussion of literary narratives, symbols and imaginations. Those with other religious belief systems may find fresh insights by sharing in my journey of faith-seeking-understanding, including where collisions of thought and practice emerge. To all readers, please forgive my short-comings and my inevitable and unhelpful biases, and may your reading bring you peace, joy and hope.

In this series

Learning to Love Wisdom includes a version of my Master of Theological Studies dissertation while *In Triune Community* and *Living in Love and Freedom* cover earlier and later ministry resources.

Meditations on Hope and Peace and *Meditations on Resilience and Renewal 1 and 2* are edited collections of sermon preparation notes. *Living Love, Travelling Together* and *Towards Eternity* include edited study series plus reflections. *Meditations on Hope and Peace* and *Living Love* were written first.

Redefining outlines some of my understandings of *Meaning and Scripture*, *Inclusion and Hierarchies*, and *Community and Leadership*. *Trinity – Worship and Wonder* reviews literature that has influenced my trinitarian theology.

The Vinedresser Revisited, *A Quiet Revival Reviewed* and *On Earth as in Heaven* respond to documentation about my involvement in church and related groups. *Joys and Sorrows* is a collection of my music with reflections.[522]

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[522] Priest, *In Triune Community*; *Learning to Love Wisdom*; *Living in Love and Freedom*; *Meditations on Resilience and Renewal*, 2; ibid., 1; Priest, *Meditations on Hope and Peace*; *Towards Eternity*; *Travelling Together*; *Living Love*; *Trinity – Worship and Wonder* (2025); *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry* (2023); *Songs of Joy and Peace* (2025); *On Earth as in Heaven – Lay Ministry with Martin Bleby* (2024); *A Quiet Revival Reviewed – a Response to a Quiet Revival, Geoffrey Bingham in Life and Ministry by Martin Bleby*; *Vinedresser Revisited, The – a Response to The Vinedresser, an Anglican Meets Wrath and Grace by Martin Bleby* (2019).

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The perspectives in these resources were first developed while preparing presentations for various settings between 1976 and 2016 including home groups, church and tertiary student camps, and teaching sessions. They also reflect my beliefs and understandings from the previous decade.

I appreciated Geoffrey Bingham's encouragement and affirmation from 1972 to 2009 when participating in practical, teaching and pastoral activities.[523]

I am thankful for my educational and theological studies, with the opportunities to learn from my lecturers and research supervisors. I value the wisdom I gained from reading a range of authors they recommended, and from subsequently accessing online resources.[524]

My lay ministry and my educational leadership and teaching would have been greatly diminished without the practical and perceptive wisdom of my family. I am very thankful for the rich insights into life and faith I have received from my parents and parents-in-law and our daughters, sons-in-law and grandchildren.

The encouragement, kindness and generosity of Bev, my wife, and our family, has led to me to a much deeper awareness of God and his mercy, grace and peace, and to a greater appreciation of the ways human community enhances our lives together. This book results from and has enabled several small steps forward.

Disclaimer

While some events and experiences proved more significant, no description in this book applies solely to one person or to a single setting. Each framework and outline developed from multiple circumstances involving different people.

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[523] *God Is Not up for Re-Election* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1984); *Happening of the Cross, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1984); *Peace of God and Man, The* (Blackwood, SA: New Creation Publications Inc., 1986); *Pastor, the Teacher, and the School, The*; *In Triune Community*; *Living Love*; *Travelling Together*; *Towards Eternity*; *A Quiet Revival Reviewed – a Response to a Quiet Revival, Geoffrey Bingham in Life and Ministry by Martin Bleby*; *Songs of Joy and Peace*.

[524] *Redefining – Meaning and Scripture, Inclusion and Hierarchies, Community and Ministry*; *Learning to Love Wisdom*; *Living in Love and Freedom*; *Assignments: Master of Theological Studies*, 2; ibid., 1; *Priest, Educational, Social and Theological Themes in Proverbs 1–9*; *Assignments: Master of Education (Leadership and Management)*; *Assignments: Graduate Diploma in Educational Computing* (2013); *Effective and Innovative Educational Leadership Relating to Implementing Digital Technologies in Schools*.

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[525] *Living in Love and Freedom*; *Learning to Love Wisdom.*

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Redefining outlines some of the ways I have sought to be more alert and better able to reject discrimination, denigration and disadvantage when involved in church and related communities.

My reflections on *Meaning and Scripture*, *Inclusion and Hierarchies* and *Community and Ministry* form an autoethnographic ethno-theological triptych – a self-written portrayal of inter-related personal explorations originating in a range of lay ministry, work and family experiences.